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SUPPORTING BIRACIAL STUDENTS THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS:  
MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE AND ADVOCACY IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Jacqueline Lee Ahlborn

May 2020

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2020

SUPPORTING BIRACIAL STUDENTS THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS:  
MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE AND ADVOCACY IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

By

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Approved March 13, 2020

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## ABSTRACT

### SUPPORTING BIRACIAL STUDENTS THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS: MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE AND ADVOCACY IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

By

Jacqueline Lee Ahlborn

May 2020

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Gretchen Generett, Ph.D.

Biracial students make up a substantial allocation of the school population, and their demographics are only expected to increase within the coming years. With this emergence of a larger Biracial community, schools need to consider how they will implement equitable resources and practices to meet the needs for this unique population. School librarians, serving as instructional leaders, can provide the necessary materials and strategies to support their students who are Biracial in order to foster positive racial identity. The purpose of this study is to explore school librarians' perspectives on the influence of multicultural literature on students' acceptance and understanding of diversity and their role in advocacy efforts as part of their professional responsibilities. This qualitative investigation examined the responses of four librarians through semi-structured interviews. The key findings support the idea that librarians need to expand their students' interactions with diverse populations to include meaningful,

authentic learning experiences. Additionally, a second fundamental finding is for school librarians to expand their multicultural literature collection regarding the portrayal of Biracial characters and their experiences. To address the findings, the study concludes with recommendations for school librarians that can assist in overcoming racial and cultural barriers so that the school environment becomes a welcoming, accepting place that honors the diversity of Biracial students and that of their peers.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my grandson, Marqwé Hughes, Jr., “Squish,” who inspires me every day. I have never known a greater love than the love for my only grandchild.

Always remember who you are and where you came from, Marqwé. Use the gifts you have been given; it would be an injustice to the world not to do so.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to sincerely thank everyone for their encouragement and support throughout my doctoral journey.

First, I would like to thank my husband, Jim, for the unconditional love and support you have given to me in every endeavor of my life. Thank you for always believing in me. I appreciate everything you do for our family. I can't wait to see what life holds for us.

I also want to thank my daughter, Hayley, for the understanding and patience you have provided me. You are the inspiration for everything I do. I hope you know how much I love you and believe in you. You are the true essence of love, and you have given me the greatest joy in being your mother and being Nonni to the most precious grandson.

My mother, Joan, always instilled in me the value of working hard and believing in myself. It is these ideals that have helped me to grow to be the person I am today, which radiates through each generation in our family. Mom, you have always been by my side, and I will always be grateful for the sacrifices you have made for me.

I want to also remember the influence my late father, Gary. He only had the opportunity to see me graduate from high school, but the integrity he imparted within me helped to guide me to be the scholar I am today. He instilled in me that I could accomplish anything I wanted and to strive for my dreams with all of my power. Dad, I know you are always with me, and your words still resonate with me: "Today's dreams are tomorrow's future."

It is with sincere gratitude that I acknowledge Dr. Generett, my chair, whose patience, confidence in me, and continued support through this journey is sincerely appreciated. I would also like to thank Dr. Brown for his guidance, encouragement, and thought-provoking



recommendations on my drafts. Thank you to Dr. Prier for recognizing my passion for my dissertation topic and encouragement for tackling this problem of practice.

I would like to thank my family, friends, the cohort of 2019 and the participants of this study who inspired and motivated me along the way.

I would like to thank Lisa for always lending a helping hand and words of encouragement along our dissertation journey.

Lastly, I would like to thank my students, who inspire me to be the best version of myself.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE LOCAL INVESTIGATION INTO A NATIONAL PROBLEM

#### Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives on the Problem

“We are asking to be included when you think about it, talk about it, and write about races in America.”

—Susan Graham, *Born Biracial*, 2019

The number of Biracial students is increasing at a rapid rate in the classrooms of America. According to Pew Research Center (2015), Biracial families have risen in the past few decades: “In 1970, among babies living with two parents, only 1% had parents who were different races from each other. By 2013, that share had risen to 10%. Today, nearly half (46%) of all multiracial Americans are younger than 18” (p. 5). The rise of multiracial students is clear and, because of the emergence, schools need to consider how they will implement equitable resources and practices to meet the needs for this unique population.

In fact, researchers concur that racial identity development is a significant aspect to consider in the education of students of color (Carter & Goodwin, 1994; McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Therefore, schools should develop a better understanding of the complex issues of racial identity for Biracial students to foster their positive racial identity. Throughout this study, Biracial refers to an individual who has one Black parent and one White parent. As Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) confirm, a correlation exists between one’s physical appearance and his or her identity. A Biracial individual’s physical appearance often causes many White people to assume that the person is Black, due to it being difficult for them to differentiate between Biracial and Black (Khanna, 2011). Specifically, the acts of racism and prejudice may arise when Biracial individuals are viewed as Black. These acts contribute to the

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concept of race being a social construct and increased racial disparities. The literature review discusses race as a social construct and the one-drop rule in length.

Recognizing that students' lives are shaped by the social construction of race is the first step to creating a holistic curriculum that helps Biracial students navigate society. Acts of racism and prejudice hinder Biracial students' learning, frequently created by a lack of understanding and empathy from peers and educators. To counter these hurtful acts, a multitude of strategies are available for schools to explore and implement to nurture positive racial identity and help students to value diversity. A few strategies include utilizing multicultural literature, literature which features Biracial characters and their life experiences, and critical thinking skills.

In terms of strategies, previous research proves that, when students are exposed to multicultural literature, they can develop a clearer perception of diverse populations. Evans (2010) maintains that "children can adapt to the changes in our increasingly multicultural society if they learn to understand and respect cultures other than their own" (p. 88). Research has also found that diverse literature, literature which reflects the sociocultural experiences of the underrepresented populations of people, can aid in the formation of a positive racial identity, which is especially important for Biracial students. As Lee and Johnson (2000) assert, "interracial children need to be exposed to fiction and non-fiction literature featuring the family settings, appearances, and life experiences similar to themselves in order to grow up as healthy Biracial children," and a lack of such literature "has caused a common problem in acquiring their racial identity" (p. 28). Racial identity can be described as the way a person views themselves, which correlates to other racial members. The lack of diverse literature is one important obstacle to equitable learning opportunities for Biracial students—and all students in general.

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Proponents contend that equitable education for all students needs to be addressed as soon as possible. For instance, according to the Scholastic Teacher and Principal School Report (2016), 97% of teachers and 98% of principals agree that equity in education should be a national priority for all students. Multicultural literature can contribute to supporting an equitable education when it helps marginalized students to see themselves reflected through the text and illustrations and when it expands students' awareness of cultural and racial differences. This type of literature can assist in overcoming racial and cultural barriers so that the school environment becomes a welcoming, accepting place that honors diversity.

Additionally, critical literacy skills can be used in connection to multicultural literature as a guide for students to question ideas present in texts and to consider different perspectives, which counters social injustices that may be present in the literature. The advantages of critical literacy skills can provide students with agency to consider new ideas for eradicating social injustices. The skills promote the analyzing of socially constructed themes in order to identify the bias present in the texts. Being able to critically analyze texts can aid in fostering a deeper understanding for the students, which they can apply to real-life situations they experience at their school, community, and the world at large. The benefits of utilizing critical literacy skills are further discussed in the literature review.

Teaching critical literacy skills is an act of advocacy on behalf of students. Advocacy, as defined by Ridnour (2011), describes one who helps to advance the interests of another and who supports a cause. Educators who teach critical literacy skills promote the interests of their students. Proponents argue that students have limited meaningful learning opportunities when students are not actively engaged in their learning experiences and in critical discussions with peers. In contrast, student dialogue allows them to learn collaboration skills, which are an

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essential part of the critical literacy method. Vygotsky (1978) explains how social interactions are of great importance when it comes to learning; he suggests that children are developed by others. These social interactions are an important aspect to consider in fostering the growth of students both academically and socially.

Finally, research has also found that when teachers critically reflect on their beliefs and values, they can promote a positive classroom culture which can foster understanding and acceptance of student diversity. When students feel accepted and validated, they display greater self-confidence and a true sense of self. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards describes the way teachers can cultivate student identity. Indeed, The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2016) was “founded in 1987 to advance the equality of teaching and learning by: maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do” (p. 8). According to their rigorous English Language Arts standards for Fairness, Equity, and Diversity, “accomplished teachers firmly believe that students are entitled to be proud of their roots and personal identities” and “are proactive about respecting and valuing identity, personality, and culture” (p. 27). This standard supports the idea of integrating multicultural literature and critical literacy skills in order to promote Biracial students’ positive sense of self.

Examining these central ideas using multicultural literature can help schools to create an inclusive educational setting where students help to advocate for social injustices, such as prejudice (Evans, 2010). Multicultural literature can also support all students, as well as Biracial students, to develop a positive identity and attain academic success. A school environment with diverse literature validates the students’ experiences, motivates them to learn, and helps them to

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achieve academically (Ogletree, 2014). These acts of social injustice toward Biracial students motivates my thoughts and actions and commits my work as an educator to that of equity.

### **Leadership Perspectives on the Problem**

I contend that the intricacies of Biracialism are not fully understood or perhaps are misunderstood by peers and educators. My experiences as a teacher support this argument. I have observed the negative impacts of prejudices by the peers of Biracial students. These students' words and actions convey that they hold certain hurtful, incorrect beliefs about their Biracial peers, which contributes to the marginalization of this population of students.

Similarly, I witnessed a lack of diversity in the educators' selection of resources. I observed a low-level of multicultural education integration into the curriculum during the twenty years I have worked in education. The extent of integration of multicultural literature was presented in the form of thematic units. In each unit, the class read a book and then sampled foods from the text's culture or discussed the highlighted culture's traditions at a low level of inquiry. The students were not encouraged to engage with the text through a critical lens; instead, they were asked questions which fall on the lower level of Bloom's Taxonomy, such as knowledge and comprehension. At the very least, the integration of multicultural/Biracial literature occurred on holidays only, giving students a limited exposure to diverse ethnicities.

Lower-level discussions and lessons around diverse books, I believe, can be beneficial if they are not the sole means of exposing children to different cultures and ethnicities. Lower-level books may include a minority character of a differing race or culture, but the diversity does not extend much beyond physicality. Books that fall into this category give limited consideration to the significance of traditions or cultural heritage. The lower-level books,



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however, can be used to introduce children to different cultures and life experiences while still portraying authentic interracial families or experiences. When a child initially discovers a new text, he or she is immersed in original thoughts and impressions (Macphee, 1997). These types of books can be followed with high-level questioning and textual analysis. Any literature written from a great understanding of diversity can expand not only the children's academic growth, but also social growth, such as the acceptance of others, open-mindedness, and the reduction or elimination of bias they may hold.

During my observations within kindergarten to twelfth grade classrooms spanning a multitude of subjects, I did not specifically focus on literature that portrayed Biracial individuals because I did not understand the implications of the lack of literature which reflected Biracial characters, their experiences, and interracial families. I did not realize the need and significance of this genre of literature; however, I believe there would have been an absence of representation. I'm now fully aware of the importance of integrating diverse literature, including literature which portrays Biracial characters, into the educational setting because it helps students explore their belief systems and values. The practice of incorporating diverse literature will allow all students to be aware of how their actions and behaviors affect others in both negative and positive manners. Multicultural texts and complex, critical discussions about them provide students with the opportunity to learn about others' principles and morals and to better comprehend different perspectives, instead of form judgments or ignite intolerance. My previous and current experiences in education have led me to frame this problem of practice within the context of social justice.

### **Specific and Local Contextual Perspectives on the Problem of Practice**

“Invisible. I’ve come to dislike the word. But there is so much truth in the fact that the multiracial population is invisible in this country.”

— Susan Graham, *Born Biracial*, 2019

Social justice efforts require empathy, understanding, respect, and fairness. When these valuable traits are recognized by educators, they can bring about visibility for students from marginalized groups. Gewirtz (1998) illuminates that social justice focuses on concepts of disrupting systems which promote marginalization and exclusionary practices. Additionally, Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) define social justice as “the exercise of altering these [institutional and organizational] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions” (p. 162). Of course, the promotion of social justice initiatives will better meet the needs of Biracial students, but it requires educators to focus on leadership skills and inclusion. I engage in this effort is by referring to the social justice goals set forth by Duquesne University. It is through these values that I frame this study.

To support social justice and instructive goals, Duquesne University’s Ed.D. in Educational Leadership dissertations focus on four core values, which are outlined in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Leaders, 2015). One core value, Social Justice Leadership, ascribes directly to the investigation of this problem of practice with underrepresentation of multicultural literature. The Ed.D. in Educational Leadership Guide (2016) explains that when a doctoral candidate engages in Social Justice Leadership, it is “with a sense of self; the skills, courage and heart to engage others; and the capacity to lead improvement, candidates will be ready to take action on behalf of all educators and families, particularly those traditionally marginalized by current systems” (p. 1).

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Biracial students have been part of a marginalized population and can often experience acts of social injustices, such as bullying, stereotypical beliefs, and cruel actions brought on by these beliefs. Because they are more likely to be viewed as Black, these students become members of a racial minority category and may experience the negatives effects of being a member of this social group from those in power. Actions that stem from racism and prejudices can exclude and deny rights, privileges, and opportunities for individuals who are marginalized by society. Biracial students may not have their voice reflected in the literature they and their peers are engaged in, thus emphasizing their status as being part of a marginalized group.

A marginalized student is defined as one with a cultural or linguistic deprivation, disadvantaged access, disenfranchised social-class, or an underrepresented racial background (Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2014). America's history of marginalization was practiced by the legislation of racially discriminatory laws, such as the one-drop rule, which maintained slavery and miscegenation laws that criminalized interracial marriages. Today, the processes of marginalization continue within our society's classrooms when Biracial and ethnically diverse individuals are not allowed an identity or a place to fit within the classroom culture. This ideation contributes to Biracial individuals feeling invisible to most people living in the United States. Research by Baxley (2008) and Williams (2011) proposes that Black/White Biracial students can experience marginalization within classrooms. Polanin and Vera (2013) explain that "typically, marginalization is the main process by which social injustice is maintained" (p. 304). One can argue that this problem of practice in regard to inequity for Biracial students within educational settings is a matter of social justice.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge around Biracial students by examining multicultural literature, understanding and acceptance of diversity, and advocacy. The problem

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of practice will be investigated through a conceptual understanding of the theoretical frameworks of multicultural literature, critical race theory, critical literacy, and Biracial identity. I hope to better understand how librarians perceive their role in creating a more inclusive literary climate for Biracial students in their contexts. Ultimately, enhanced knowledge and activism in their roles as librarians will impact the learning experiences of Biracial students and help their peers to be more empathic.

The educational leaders who strive for social justice aspire to high levels of teaching and learning. One can argue the fact that educators need to continuously advocate for students who have been traditionally marginalized. The ELA Standards for Fairness, Equity, and Diversity (2014) states, “accomplished English language arts teachers advocate for voices that are silent or not present in the classrooms” (p. 27). These are rigorous standards which ensure all students are represented and their distinctive voices heard. Thus, contributing to the visibility of a group of students who are rapidly emerging within the classrooms of the United States is a pertinent objective for all those involved in education.

The topic is important to me on both professional and personal levels. Professionally, I am an educator in an urban school district, and we have a Biracial population. I believe that I was adequately trained in culturally-relevant teaching and, with my own view of social justice, was aware of the issues and thought that I was fully prepared to meet the needs of Biracial students. It was not until I became a grandmother for the first time that I became personally invested because my grandson is Biracial. I thought about the experiences he would encounter in school, how he would handle them, how his mother and father would address issues, and how I could support them. I began to ponder questions as to how Biracial children identify themselves and how self-identity develops. How will this impact their success in school and what can I do

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as a grandmother and teacher to help all Biracial children feel included and accepted not only in the classroom, but anywhere their journey takes them? I want to empower myself with the knowledge and strategies in order to support them, but also want to empower others. My goal is to make educators aware that this is an important issue to undertake because we all can play a valuable part in the resolution. Living in a community with little diversity and experiencing the discrimination that touched my life triggered a bundle of questions and emotions and encouraged me to tell my story and offer possible solutions.

My personal narrative inspired me to seek a deeper consciousness to the questions of diversity that were dwelling inside me and to learn more about the complexities of Biracialism and how Biracial students can be supported within the school system. Through my experiences as a grandmother, I have been confronted with generations of deep-seated assumptions and stereotypical beliefs regarding a part of my grandson's heritage being African American. I learned how critical race theory plays a factor in different aspects of one's life. For instance, I have found it difficult to walk into a popular bookstore and readily choose a story that reflects my grandson's African American heritage, much less his dual heritage. The same dilemma arose when selecting toys for him; diverse choices were absent among the many White action figures and heroes. Thoughtful and intentional planning needs to be involved when shopping for books and toys depicting different ethnicities. In the current atmosphere, one does not have the privilege of a wide selection and often needs to special order.

My experience as a teacher heightened my awareness of racial identity of the Biracial population when I was confronted with the belief that my students viewed my grandson as African American and employed a forced racial identity upon him. "No," I would respond, "he's Biracial," to their response, "he's Black." These conversations opened my eyes to the fact that

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his identity was already being questioned at the early age of one. I believe that every individual has the right to form their own racial identity and be comfortable with who they are and how they identify, with no explanations or criticisms. This, however, is not the case for my grandson. His identity is already being decided and enforced upon him by others. How will this thinking affect his thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and relationships when he is of school age and beyond? Will his teachers hold the same views? Will it affect his academic achievement? How can he be provided with an equitable education utilizing resources and strategies which promote understanding and acceptance by his peers? How can I, myself, provide these same opportunities for my Biracial students? These questions shaped the theoretical framing of this study, as well as my leadership perspectives.

### **Central Research Questions**

The study is governed by a problem of practice and will be investigated through a qualitative study of a current problem within school environments today. The problem is a matter of inequity for Biracial students who need to be provided the opportunity to be represented in classroom literature. The injustice, if not addressed, can cause a lack of motivation, invalidation, and academic failures for Biracial students. The absence of multicultural literature that represents Biracial students and the inequities they experience within school settings compelled me to focus my research study on ways to improve these social injustices. I chose to challenge these problems by inspiring educators to make a commitment to dismantling structures of inequity and tracking qualitative data about student (and educator) reactions, engagement, and overall impressions. The three research questions that guide this important work are as follows:

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1. How do school librarians select, promote, and utilize multicultural literature within an educational setting?
2. In what ways does the school librarian believe that multicultural literature influences students' understanding and acceptance of diversity?
3. How do school librarians understand advocacy as a part of their professional responsibility?

The effects of literature and the strategies the students use when reading play critical roles in the development of their identity and can contribute to helping students view diversity as an asset. Specifically, when viewing Biracialism, the establishment of a positive racial identity contributes to a higher self-esteem (Rockquemore, 2002). When students feel confident and take pride in themselves, they can achieve a high level of academic success by being more motivated to learn (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). They will be more ready and able to face challenges and failures resiliently. With a deeper sense of diversity, one can more accurately and maturely understand our growing, diversified society and truly embody sensitivity and empathy. These factors are important when a child is acquiring skills necessary to navigate within the realms of our heterogeneous society. As Ahn (2011) explains, a “child’s personal identity is crucial, not only in individual development but also for positioning as a social being” (p. 415). A child’s thoughts, values, and behaviors are influenced through these social environments—mainly the school setting. A Biracial student’s positive sense of self begins with feeling validated and accepted, and these feelings can be fostered through inclusive, open-minded school environments in which they are welcome members.

I have addressed how the social, cultural, and historical perspectives connect to the local contextual perspectives, to my own leadership perspectives, and finally to the specific problem

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of practice which I seek to improve. Solutions will be offered through evidenced-based recommendations, dependent upon the needs discovered in the study. I have framed this dissertation around the three research questions indicated above, and the chapter that follows reviews relevant theoretical and empirical literature related to these essential research questions.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Storytelling and First Social Interactions

“Our journey to understand race begins by thinking, writing, and looking at our own racial histories and by sharing them with others.”

— Bonnie Davis,  
*The Biracial and Multiracial Experience: A Journey to Racial Literacy*, 2009

We live in a social world, and through these social environments, children first learn language skills, cognitive intelligence, relationship building, and the development of self-esteem and identity (Keller, 2018). These social and growth-based skills are critical in order to navigate successfully within our society. Pontecorvo and Sterponi (2002) illuminate that the opportunity for social interactions within the home and school are the most predominant settings where social interactions contribute to individual development. At the time of birth, infants learn how to have their needs met. They learn from interactions with parents and caregivers who they communicate with, learn from, and acquire the skills that become the basis for all other relationships and interactions they will encounter in society (Wang, 2018). The exchanges and communications with others support the growth in academic and social learning skills, but also form our attitudes about ourselves and others.

Likewise, language acquisition and socialization skills are important in these first encounters—but reading and writing also become an important role in conveying values, beliefs, and understanding of one’s own culture and other cultures. Lev Vygotsky (1978) explains that speech and writing, which are developed from one’s culture, are utilized to navigate social environments. The participation of storytelling and then reading and responding to diverse types of literature is one way in which social interactions can be navigated at a young age utilizing

these tools. Storytelling, reading, and social interaction opportunities help children learn how to act appropriately in the world and reflect images of the world to them. Lantolf (2007) details that language skills are indispensable: “Through speaking (and writing) we are able to gain control over our memory, attention, planning, perception, learning, and development, but this control is derived from the social activity we engage in not only with our contemporaries but also with those who have preceded us in time through the cultural artifacts, including language, they have created and left behind” (p. 695). Verbal storytelling and reading aloud can bridge the gap between the social world and a child’s first sense of self.

The practice of storytelling can enable children to convey their experiences and thoughts using language, thus aiding in a greater self-concept. Early practices can enable even young children to develop a sense of identity. Nelson (2003) describes children of preschool age and early elementary school age experiencing the emergence of a self-concept. By participating in storytelling experiences, parents and educators can impact identity formation in children (Hibbin, 2016). Stories, as described by Engel (2016), can “narrate an inner life, an identity, and share that inner life and identity with others” (What Storytelling Can Do, para. 3). In this way, children create an identity through their use of words, which usually begins around the age of two years old when they can form short sentences.

The process of storytelling begins first with parents and caregivers when children can describe past and familiar experiences with them. Westly and Culatta (2016) describe the acquisition of a sense of self by stating, that “children’s sense of self and early narratives emerge as they engage with their caretakers in reminiscing about shared experiences” (p. 262). Thus, children create and recreate their lived experiences and that of others through narration. This

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oral narration provides children with not only the opportunity to develop deeper senses of self, but to connect to their listeners through storytelling.

On the receiving side of a story, children learn to be active listeners. Practicing active listening during storytelling, they can learn about their culture's ideals, as well as that of other cultures through their parents passing down stories to the next generation. Everyone can relate to being told a great story when they were young. I remember being intrigued with a book which described dolls from different countries. I would examine the pictures intently, looking for clues to a world unknown to me. It had made such an impact on me that I still have the book to this day and was excited to share it with my daughter when she was young. Storytelling can be a powerful tool in exposing children to racial and ethnic diversity; diverse stories can develop a greater awareness of others through the engagement in storytelling. Throughout a child's development, their learning and thinking become more complex. Their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors continue to be shaped by the influences of others, so the influence of parents, caretakers, and educators must include various stories that include all cultures, races, character traits, and types of experiences. Some examples may include sharing or reading stories featuring various time periods, plotlines, religions, etc.

When children enter the school environment, they will further advance their understanding of self. Within this setting, children may be exposed for the first time to a diverse population they have only heard about through storytelling or shared reading experiences. In fact, Wang (2018) explains that "children develop knowledge about the physical and social worlds as a result of not only their increasing cognitive capacities but also their expanding cultural experiences" (p. 54). Ideally, the school environment can contribute to the development of a student's identity and their appreciation of the diversity of others. Proponents assert that

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children can learn about racial and ethnic differences by reading literature, specifically multicultural literature. The school environments in which children spend a large amount of their school day can play an important role in this endeavor. Educators have the incredible opportunity and responsibility to teach and model the foundations of early literacy skills and provide the needed resources to foster communication skills and an inclusive mindset. By expanding upon storytelling, they can also transition from spoken to written stories that represent multiple backgrounds.

Children not only benefit cognitively from reading multicultural literature through the development of vocabulary and comprehension, but also benefit socially and emotionally. Because racial awareness begins at an early age, one can argue that it is important to expose young children to multicultural literature in order to prevent prejudices and bias. Kohl (1995) explains the significance that books play in helping children to recognize prejudices and bias and the role they take in influencing their values. It can be argued that the increasing Biracial population is one racial group in particular which experiences injustices and is the target of prejudice. This population of students is growing at a rapid rate within the United States, and critics argue that schools need to be readily prepared for the emergence of Biracial students to best meet their needs

### **The Growing Biracial Population and Implications of Race as a Social Construction**

The 2000 U.S. Census recognized multiracial individuals as a distinct racial category for the first time in its history, which allowed this group the opportunity to select multiple racial groups. This change was a result of activists who argued that multiracial individuals had the right to self-identify and not be confined to certain racial groups dictated by the government.

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According to Winters and DeBose (2003), multiracial activists argued “ethnoracial self-identification was a person’s right” (p. 69). The 2010 United Census Bureau reports the rising data for these groups: “Between 2000 and 2010, the White and Black population increased the most in size, growing by over 1 million people, with a substantial 134 percent change” (p. 5). Because these Biracial students make up a substantial allocation of the population, their demographic is only expected to increase within the coming years.

The Biracial population needs the school system’s support to ensure that resources reflect their experiences and educators recognize and advocate for change. Researchers contend that the school systems are well-versed in providing rich, authentic experiences and resources which portray the stories of their White students, a practice which continues to remain the norm. Increasing diverse literature resources will provide more equity, ensuring that marginalized students receive opportunities to be visible within the school system. As Ladson-Billings (1998) asserts, marginalized groups would have access to the same curriculum, instruction, and funding as White students in an environment where opportunity equal endures. Many believe that school districts, as well as their educators, have an obligation to recognize this rapidly growing racial group, validate their unique life experiences, and help them to form a positive racial identity through a multitude of diverse literature and strategies.

Proponents contend that it is imperative that schools understand the racial disparities that Black-White Biracial students face in American schools, where the social construction of race continues. Biracial students encounter racism and prejudice due to established preconceived ideals. They can be presented with bullying by other students, lowered expectations by educators, resources which reflect bias, and educators who view all the students as the same, not recognizing their differences and celebrating their uniqueness. According to the National Bully

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Prevention Center (2016), “more than one out of every five” students are being bullied in school (National Bullying Prevention Center).

Research has also demonstrated that individuals who experience negative effects of racism can suffer life-long consequences. Research indicates that people of color experience harmful psychological and physiological effects such as fear, resentment, helplessness, isolation, anxiety, stress, and exhaustion (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). Prejudices are noticeably present everywhere in society, and it is important that school districts provide students with opportunities to interact with multicultural literature (Landt, 2006) and critical literacy skills (Lazar & Offenber, 2011). These tools are particularly important to combat racism and help to advocate on the behalf of Biracial students, who can experience acts associated with racist beliefs. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) affirm that racism is still alive and effecting all areas of our lives: “Racism surrounds us, permeates our ideas and conversations, focuses our relationships with one another, shapes our practices, and drives much in our personal, social, and political lives” (p. 198). Throughout history, the Biracial population has been a target of much debate and has significantly changed the way in which we understand these unique individuals. A deeper understanding of their personal narratives can promote a positive classroom culture and ensure that they develop positive racial attitudes about themselves.

### **Phenotype and Identity**

“Teachers commonly base their expectations of students on information such as gender, race, and physical appearance which are immediately discernible”. (Williams, 2011, p. 200)

In order to develop a deeper understanding of a Biracial individual’s personal narrative; one must begin with knowledge about stereotypical thinking they may witness. Although

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humans have visible differences in physical appearances, we share 99.9 percent of genetics, making us incredibly similar (Angier, 2000). Still, humans tend to draw boundaries to separate and categorize one another. For instance, physical appearances are usually associated with one's race. However, it is important to recognize that race as a biological reality is not factual. The American Anthropological Association (1998) describes this concept by explaining "present-day inequalities between so-called 'racial' groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances" (p. 8). This study supports the research, which finds that the concept of race is not a biological fact.

Even though there is no fixed racial phenotype to determine race, the fact remains that society categorizes people differently based upon their physical appearance. These racial categories change over time and across the country; however, the socially constructed concept of race has remained consistent in the United States over time. As Khanna and Harris (2009) declare the United States' population considers race a classification: "Americans often view racial categories as real categories that reflect natural divisions in the population" (p. 369). These racial categories determine the opportunities and privileges one has access to.

Furthermore, we live in a society which maintains that power and privilege continue to maintain hierarchy. Effects of this structure of power and privilege, which include racism and prejudice, are lasting reminders that both are being practiced across all global boundaries. The life-changing consequences of this hierarchy can include lower self-esteem, academic challenges, and health issues. The societal pressures and beliefs can even affect the way people interact with one another. As Karlsen and Nazroo (2002) illuminate, "The experience of racism, for example, can be seen actually to structure an individual's own identity, as well as affecting

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the way in which someone with that identity interacts with others” (p. 4). It can also play a critical part to those in power, who believe these facts are absolute. They can experience false fears through stereotyping people of color, failing to learn from others’ experiences, and failing to form lasting relationships with others—all due to beliefs that they hold regarding the mere color of one’s skin.

In policy, the “one-drop rule” identified Black-White Americans with a portion of African American ancestry as African American. The rule’s purpose was to maintain distinct racial classifications, and the law was codified legally, in addition to socially and culturally. This law was written in order to maintain slavery of mixed-race children of Black descent during a time of an increasing rate of Black and White mixed individuals (Spickard, 1992). The “one-drop rule” is still evident in today’s society, where “race” can determine an individual’s rights, privileges, and opportunities.

The complicated connection of the United States history of slavery and the “one-drop-rule” can be found in racism, defined as a system of advantage based on an individual’s race (Wellman, 1977). Prejudice is also evident, defined by McLeod (2008) as “an unjustified or incorrect attitude (usually negative) towards an individual based solely on the individual’s membership of a social group” (p. 1). The difference between prejudice and racism is the fact that prejudice involves no structure of power and refers to bias and unfounded preference. Racism entails the systemic and structural oppression of a marginalized group. Today, White men hold the most prominent positions of power and wealth. With this influence, they can reap the benefits afforded to their majority population in the United States. People of color (in the case of this study the Black population), have never held this power due to systemic and structural control; therefore, Black people are not able to engage in acts of racism.



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Importantly, we should all recognize this invisibility of race and acknowledge that we, as a society, need to focus on understanding others' experiences and accepting who they are. If we do not understand the fundamental concepts of acceptance and tolerance, it will be a challenge to address and combat racism. That said, researchers contend that when one fails to see an individual's race, it weakens our ability to recognize racism and its ramifications. To ignore one's race reinforces that his/her cultural heritage is unimportant. This ideology does not validate the person's identity, nor does it acknowledge his/her lived experiences. Each race should be acknowledged and valued to best address racism and prejudice, not disregarded.

Society may not even be aware or believe that these factors of inequality exist for the Biracial population. Even though Biracial individuals can face negative experiences, they are resilient. Research has shown that there are also beneficial aspects from possessing dual heritages. As Cruz-Janzen (1999) theorizes, one who holds racial duality can experience useful traits, such as adaptability and resiliency. The adaptability that they possess allows them to navigate through racially diverse environments. Biracial people can encounter both majority and minority groups and fluidly interacts within those spaces based on their experiences of holding dual heritages. Nitardy (2004) suggests that when Biracial children are raised to encompass the values of both races, they are usually happier than an individual who self-identifies with only one parent's race. Biracial individuals have the flexibility to reinvent themselves and adhere to any race they choose. In fact, Shih and Sanchez (2005) explain the ease at which a multiracial individual is able to transform between multiple racial identities effortlessly. Additionally, Gaither (2015) concurs that "this capacity to flexibly think from multiple racial perspectives is unique to the multiracial population" (p. 116). Thus, Biracial individuals are able to be resilient in the face of opposition.

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Biracial individuals hold another advantage: they are more likely to challenge the concept of race and can more easily understand that race is socially constructed. This enables them to be more accepting of diversity within people. They can see people for who they really are and not categorize a person by racial stereotypes. Instead, they allow people the freedom to choose who they want to be with no assumptions, the very concept which they themselves may not be afforded.

In the education domain, theorists emphasize the fact that when schools are conscious of selecting diverse materials and actively teaching critical literacy skills, they can address the Biracial students' negative experiences. This mindful effort to include more diverse literature and practices can have favorable, rather than adverse, effects on their self-esteem and racial identity. This generates thought-provoking questions. How can schools develop resources and strategies to help strengthen Biracial students' positive racial identities and help students feel validated by teachers and peers? How can schools also combat issues of racism and prejudice to provide equitable learning for all students?

### **The Impact of Whiteness on Racial Identity Formation of Biracial Students**

“Why are you trying to categorize me and not just letting me be who I am?” (Franco, Katz, & O'Brien, 2016, p. 108)

Not only do Biracial students struggle with the issues of racism and prejudice, but they can also experience racial identity conflicts. Their struggles arise because the issues of race are complex, especially for the Biracial population. Biracial individuals can experience stressors when they are frequently asked about their racial identity choice or if they are forced into a racial category. Society is quick to categorize people into groups, and it is common to identify Biracial people monoracially. Determination of a person's “race” is usually subject to their phenotype.

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Physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair texture, or the shape of one's nose, serve as a method to assign an individual to a racial category. Khanna (2010) argues that many White people can mistakenly label others: "*Any visible Black physical characteristics (regarding skin color, hair texture, and/or facial features) compel many Whites to assume these Biracial individuals are Black simply because it is difficult for them to distinguish between Black and Biracial based on phenotype*" (p. 112). Thus, judgments based on physical looks alone are not always accurate, and we should not readily categorize others.

In an influential study, Roberts and Gelman (2015) examined the categorization of Black-White individuals. They found that both White children and adults, across all age groups, categorized multiracial individuals as Black rather than White when parentage information was not disclosed to them. This finding highlights the perceptual biases that are directed towards Biracial individuals. The authors explain that this issue is of "societal importance, because it stands to further our understanding of the experiences of an understudied yet growing demographic group" (p. 1830). As the authors propose, we should examine how we identify a Biracial individual and challenge the thinking which perpetuates the invalidation of this population. The findings of this study strengthen the argument for necessary multicultural literature infused with critical literacy skills.

As discussed, research has shown that students will tend to identify their Biracial peers as Black, which may contribute to stereotypical beliefs and assumptions. If a Biracial individual's features are too ambiguous, he/she may be frequently asked to define oneself. In these circumstances, a Biracial person may feel the need to defend their racial choice and experience feelings of isolation, confusion, anger, or sadness. In a study conducted by Franco, Katz, & O'Brien (2016), 69% of participants who were Biracial responded to invalidation by

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experiencing feelings of “being upset or hurt, confused, excluded or isolated” (p. 103). Identity invalidation occurs when a Biracial individual is placed into a racial category which he/she does not identify with. Identity invalidation is common for Biracial Black/White individuals and can lead to serious consequences. Franco, Katz, and O’Brien (2016) describes these consequences when they caution that, “experiences of identity invalidation can have deleterious effects on mental health and racial identity” (p. 97). Given these hardships, how can Biracial individuals answer questions regarding their race and not perceive it as a negative experience when it can so often make them feel rejected or misunderstood?

Because Biracial students are neither White nor Black, their genetics set them apart from both races. Sadly, Biracial students can be viewed as imposters by members of each monoracial group because of their physical appearance (Williams, 2011). Biracial students, however, may still feel the need to comply with social ambiguities, which can also cause feelings of confusion when they wonder where they fit within society. Nuttgens (2010) poses the following question: “If, because of interracial parentage, one’s race does not fit neatly into a social prescribed category how, then, is one to experience oneself within a racialized society?” (p. 355). Subsequently, Biracial students may feel forced to choose a single racial category, which has been termed forced-choice dilemma (Standen, 1996). Negative emotional consequences in the form of decreased self-esteem and motivation and increased anxiety can be contributed to being forced to choose and recognize only one racial identity (Iyenger & Lepper, 2002). Researchers found that feelings which stem from these conflicts can cause students to feel that their racial identity is not accepted or validated.

The negative experiences of racial misalignment can affect how Biracial students feel about themselves and their relationships. These findings suggest that we need to teach children

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the history of race and racism so that they can avoid perpetuating racism. With positive classroom teachings, empathy and understanding intersect. Biracial individuals should be provided with more acceptance and validation to move toward an ideation of them choosing their own stance in life by identifying any way they wish. Ideally, Biracial students' identities will not be forced upon them, and they will be readily accepted—whether their self-identification remains fixed or changes fluidly. Their choices are unlimited, and they may choose to identify with either racial group, neither racial group, or both groups, with no need to feel an explanation is needed.

Overall, Biracial individuals should be encouraged to choose any racial identity that they feel expresses who they are and not be confined to society's views. People should not feel boxed into certain pre-determined categories: "Race, being the social construction that it is, should not necessarily limit the selection of available identities" (Nuttgens, 2010, p. 363). These factors all influence a Biracial student's racial identity, and it becomes extremely important for schools to address racial inequity in order for students to develop a positive racial identity. Supporting the formation of a positive racial identity for Biracial students can impact what their peers learn about race by helping them understand how and why racism occurs and the effects it has on a group of people. Research has shown that understanding and empathy will help enable any group that is marginalized to feel validated, leading to a healthy racial identity. Educators play a primary role in modeling and building empathy, acceptance, and openness in their classrooms—through reading, discussions, and activities.

The Biracial population is exposed to unique experiences known only to them, which can contribute to shaping self-identity. One can look to the concept of the looking-glass-self for an understanding of how identity is formed and one's self-image is shaped by society. According to

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early American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1902), the looking-glass process begins first with how we imagine we present to others. Second, the person imagines and reacts to what perceptions others have based on their appearance and how they present themselves. The last step entails the person developing a self-concept from the judgments they made, either positive or negative. As Shaffer (2005) explains, we make changes according to not just our reactions, but mainly to others' reactions of ourselves: "If the others' evaluation of the actor is positive, the affect is positive (like pride), but if the others' evaluation is negative, the affect is negative (like shame or embarrassment)" (p. 54). Thus, if society holds stereotypical views of a Biracial individual, it can influence how Biracial students see themselves because they accept the stereotypes imposed on them. This can lead to racism and prejudice, which plays a factor in shaping their racial identity.

The consequences of these acts of racism and prejudice are considered "push" factors by Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002). In fact, the rejection by a White person can cause a Biracial student to deny their White identity altogether, and additionally their Biracial heritage. The negative encounters that Biracial individuals experience often will "remind them that they are different from Whites, and as a consequence often pushed them away from White (and sometimes even Biracial) identities" (Khanna, 2011, p. 66). White individuals who practice these negative connotations work to deny Biracial individuals the freedom to choose how they attempt to identify and how they wish to be perceived. The positive experiences that a Biracial individual is exposed to help to "pull" them towards a racial identity. Because these factors are in direct correlation to aiding in identity formation, advocates claim it is critical that schools recognize this and integrate strategies to eliminate negative experiences so that Biracial students are able to confidently and freely choose their racial identities. They need to be allotted the

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freedom to self-define and to choose to identify with one race, both races, or neither race with fluency: changing at different times and in different circumstances as they personally desire and see fit.

### **Sociocultural Theory**

“Building a self is not a process of an isolated mind but of interaction with and evaluation of a social world.”

— Debra Van Ausdale & Joe Feagin,  
*The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism*, 2013

Proponents argue that schools play a critical role in developing not only academic skills, but also that of social and emotional skills through interactions children have in educational settings. These interactions can also play a fundamental role in how a child learns about race and racism, which directly helps to form a Biracial student’s racial identity. Children learn about their own culture and others’ diversity through interactions they have with their peers within the school environment. Elementary students in the United States spend an average 6.7 hours a day in school. This is a time when schools can provide a critical foundation for students, a place where they can explore multiple peers’ perspectives. Because children spend a large amount of time in these settings, education is vital to exposing them to positive, accurate racial influences and enriching their openness to diversity and self-concepts.

Of course, it is important for schools to formulate a process for supporting Biracial students and to counter any negative experiences and to help shape a positive racial identity. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory focuses on the social interactions between people and their culture and how they then internalize the information. According to Vygotsky (1978) “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child

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(intrapsychological)” (p. 57). Advocates of social justice initiatives in education believe that children’s social interactions need to be in an environment in which mutual respect is demonstrated, empathy is present, diverse materials are utilized, and critical skills are highlighted. These types of learning environments, fused with positive social interactions with peers, are settings where Biracial students can internalize these inspiring concepts. The positive lessons and exposure to encouraging sociocultural influences enable Biracial students to create an assured social identity not only in school, but within a globalized society.

Everyone within a child’s life has the responsibility and capacity to affect them and build their self-esteem. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) explain that “no individual child can create self-identity without the cooperation of a wide range of others, including peers, teachers, parents, and, most important, the broader social world” (p. 92). The research by Hyun (2003) found that by engaging in meaningful experiences, one can eradicate pre-existing views that young children have because they possess the intellectual capacity that permits them to formulate new impressions of others. Schools assume the responsibility to be a part of this learning process for children so that all students may develop a positive self-concept, value the differences of others, and help to combat social injustices. Schools must recognize that their students’ futures depend upon educators taking action for positive change—starting early in the students’ school careers. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) also argue that social interactions play a large role in shaping children: “Indeed, their very personalities, identities, and life-coping styles are framed and formed in these social fields” (p. 42). It has been proven that teachers are role models within the classroom, and their attitudes and beliefs can influence not only their students’ academic success, but also their social and emotional growth.



### **Color-Blindness and Its Implications**

“I wanted to achieve equality for all students, not realizing that treating all students the same was injustice in itself.” (Boyd & Noblit, 2015, p. 449)

Schools can utilize successful practices to address continued inequities of Biracial students within the educational system, especially during these changing times of student diversity. Teachers can foster the development of a Biracial student’s racial identity by employing their accepting beliefs, effective resources, and proven strategies. As previously stated in the literature review, it is important to recognize one’s own race, but especially important for those who are traditionally marginalized. Teachers who instruct students who are Biracial must be ready to meet them with understanding and aid them in the shaping of a positive racial identity. In order to accomplish this, educators must examine their own values and beliefs around race so they can view their Biracial students for who they are, what they can contribute to the classroom, and what peers can learn from their experiences.

Some educators believe it is in the best interest of the student not to recognize race and argue that they want to ensure they are not being discriminatory and treating students equally, which entails colorblind tactics. When they employ color-blind tactics, educators do not realize the importance of seeing and discussing race, a procedure which supports racist ideologies. Diggles (2014) explains that color-blindness “perpetuates racist ideologies by denying the system of privilege and oppression that exists on the basis of race” (p. 33). Students require the opposite of color-blindness. They need teachers who purposefully recognize their students’ lived experiences and work towards providing them with an equitable education. Much attention has been drawn to color-blindness, and research has proven that it can lead to being unable to recognize unconscious bias, which influences our views and treatment of minorities. Whether it be the teacher’s own bias or a student’s bias, prejudice needs to be acknowledged and addressed

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so that racial inequities are diminished. To recognize one's color is the beginning of teaching students to identify racial bias and acts of racism.

Moreover, bias and stereotypical thinking can affect the way that teachers address and treat students who are Biracial. Often, teachers will hold lower expectations for Biracial students, ultimately affecting his/her academic success and self-esteem. The teacher's actions can permeate to other students within the classroom to create a negative, inequitable learning environment. The most compelling argument is presented by York (2016), who explains that "young children's thinking is limited, distorted, and inconsistent, which makes them susceptible to believing stereotypes" (p. 32). When witnessing bias and stereotyping with the classroom, teachers can engage in thoughtful discussions about empathy and understanding; these best practices will lead to recognizing and accepting a peer's identity and their lived experiences. This exercise of warmth and embracing diversity can change a peer's thinking about others who are different than themselves while helping Biracial students build strong racial identities. It enables the student to feel validated and excited to take pride in their racial heritage, knowing that they are accepted for whom they are and what they contribute to the school environment.

### **Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

As previously stated, teachers may hold low expectations for Biracial students. They may believe that the student's poor academic performance is inevitable and will continue to be unaffected over time. Educators striving for social justice for their students can look to culturally relevant techniques, as outlined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) to guide their work in order to address these concerns. At times, students may not bear the fruit of this notion because, in the past and continuing in today's classrooms, cultural deficit approaches to teaching and learning

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have been practiced. These unsuitable approaches perpetuate the stereotyping of minority students. According to Trumbull (2005), culture is defined as “the system of values, beliefs, and ways of knowing that guide communities of people in their daily lives” (p. 35). When educators practice the cultural deficit theory of thinking, they interpret cultural and racial differences as a deficit. Students are believed to be limited by their linguistic skills, social capacities, and culture, which place the blame upon students for not experiencing academic success.

This cultural deficit theory proclaims that minority students do not experience the same academic successes as do their White majority peers due to their cultural backgrounds as compared to the White American culture: “Simply put, the goal of deficit approaches was to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Teachers also view the student’s family dynamics as deprived and dysfunctional and take no responsibility for their students’ learning: “The aim of the model should be to generate and improve student underachievement in school; however, it often fails significantly to take into account problems within the larger school system and the larger society” (Blaise, 2014, p. 21). Gloria Ladson-Billings theory is explained in the following section.

Ladson-Billings (2014) experienced this dilemma when reflecting upon researching how to educate African American students to foster academic achievement and instruction that facilitates student learning. This research remains significant and has impacted future research endeavors. Her experiences with the research were related to cultural deficit thinking, which described the students as disadvantaged, at-risk, underachievers, or deprived, and contained no references to academic achievement or excellence. She asserted that it was her responsibility to

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change this thinking and “hoped to help scholars and practitioners learn *from* and not merely *about* African American students” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 76). It was with this hope that the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy was conceived. Ladson-Billings (2009) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as one “that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20).

Culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to ratify the underachievement of marginalized students of color. The secret behind culturally relevant pedagogy, according to Ladson-Billings (2014), is “the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture” (p. 77). The following section explains what the pedagogy proposes to achieve.

Ladson-Billings’ theory would propose “to do three things—produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 474). In her first tenant, Ladson-Billings (1995) explained that academic achievement was characterized not only by standardized assessments, but that the “students demonstrated an ability to read, write, speak, compute, pose and solve problems at sophisticated levels—that is, pose their own questions about the nature of teacher- or text-posed problems and engage in peer review of problem solutions” (p. 475). In the second tenant, she described cultural competence as “a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (p. 476). In her third tenant, she stressed that the students need to “recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities” (p. 476). These tenants were the foundation for more sustaining cultural practices.

It is with these three goals and changes in student diversity within the educational systems that Paris’s (2012) theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy built upon the framework of

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Ladson-Billings. Notably, Ladson-Billings (2014) points out that this new concept speaks “to the changing and evolving needs of dynamic systems” (p. 76). Theories, practices, concepts, and ideas always need to be challenged, revised, and built upon over time in order to meet the ever-increasing changes and demands for equity of our country’s marginalized students of color.

Ladson-Billings (2014) argues that “any scholar who believes that she has arrived and the work is finished does not understand the nature and meaning of scholarship” (p. 82). The idea of culturally sustaining pedagogy embraces the fact that culture is always changing and reflects it within the practices that encompass it. Ladson-Billings (2014) explains how the author of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) uses her work to then “layer the multiple ways that this notion of pedagogy shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity—that is, that they become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects” (p. 76). Paris (2012) questioned the terms “relevant” and “responsive” and queried “if they go far enough in their orientation to the languages and literacies and other cultural practices of communities marginalized by systematic inequalities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society” (p. 93). The following section explains how this ideal was pushed further.

The term culturally sustaining pedagogy was introduced as an alternative. According to Paris and Alim (2014), culturally sustaining pedagogy “seeks to perpetuate and foster *-to sustain-* in linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change” (p. 88). The framework seeks to eradicate a history of schooling where White middle-class values are viewed as the norm and thus the only perspective seen as right and correct. In fact, Paris and Alim state that the culturally sustaining

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pedagogy is an essential: “An especially necessary framework for educators who seek social justice for their students of color, whose sense of self is constantly under attack from schooling practices and policies that racialize and thereby devalue, distort, and erase their language, culture, and identity” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 45). In short, culturally sustaining pedagogies seek to sustain the language and cultural ways of young people of color and their communities and “acknowledges the complexities of identities, lived conditions, and performances of resistance that are a part of the schooling experiences of many students of color” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 38). Educators can contribute to sustaining the language and culture of their students by exposing them to multicultural literature. The following section discusses the advantages of utilizing multicultural literature in school libraries to introduce new, unknown worlds to students while acknowledging the disparity on its shelves.

### **Multicultural Literature and the Gaps on School Library Shelves**

“Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us; in the reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience.” (Bishop, 1990, p. ix)

Teachers can support the positive racial identity of Biracial students through utilizing the tools of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy capsulizes both a mindset and framework to help develop students’ sense of identity, understanding, and empathy toward others. This can be achieved through applying a host of resources and strategies, which are important to examine. To start, selection and intention of literature are two vital tenants to culturally sustaining pedagogy. When selected with intention and infused with critical literacy skills, multicultural literature has a direct correlation with fostering insights into one’s own cultural experiences and broadening perspectives of others. In fact, researchers argue that

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multicultural literature can have positive, lasting effects on students. In order to reflect the growing population of students who are Biracial, it is important for teachers to select a wide variety of literature for use in the school environment: “To accept and affirm the pluralism in our schools, it is necessary to recognize interracial students who have mixed-race parents or ancestors by integrating interracial literature in school” (Lee & Johnson, 2000, p. 27). This literature can assist in filling in the gaps many libraries experience.

Some people argue that schools need to focus on identifying and analyzing literature that portrays Biracial characters and integrates these books into the curriculum. Proponents maintain that the messages students of all ages absorb from literature can have a profound impact upon their perspectives of themselves and others. All types of literature are influential in constructing a broad understanding of a student’s world: “Reading is a formative part of childhood: education, widening horizons, offering adventures and stoking imagination and creativity” (PEN America, 2016, p. 4). Consequently, the texts which are used in schools also have an influence on students’ identity formation and their views of the world.

Multicultural literature can help students to value and accept all cultures, races, and ways of being. According to Norton (1995), multicultural literature is “a literature about racial or ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from the White Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature” (p. 560). Regarding equity concerning race, multicultural literature within the classroom can help students to identify with their own culture and enable peers to understand, appreciate, and respect different cultures and ones which may be new to them. Sometimes, texts with unfamiliar characters and ideas are referred to as “windows or “doors” while those with similar characters and values as the reader are called “mirrors”:

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“Multicultural literature provides both a mirror into one’s own world and a door into the culture and lives of others” (D’Angelo & Dixey, 2001, p. 85). Both “window” or “door” and “mirror” texts should be readily available to students and incorporated into every curriculum.

Thus, multicultural literature can change and transform students’ views of equity, if chosen thoughtfully and implemented purposefully. A wide body of research indicates that this form of literature provides students with a better understanding and empathy of diverse populations. If meaningful multicultural literature is implemented at the highest level and merged with strategies which require students to think critically, these actions will cause positive social changes. The chosen works of literature and accompanying lessons and classroom discussions will address racial inequities, support a positive racial identity for Biracial students, and enable students to feel empowered to recognize and act upon injustices.

Of course, multicultural literature is a key component of multicultural education. The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) describes multicultural education as a “philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, and human dignity” that “challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice.” NAME also recognizes that “school curriculum must directly address racism.” The representation of Biracial individuals included in children’s literature, however, is practically non-existent, whereas White privilege is evident when books portraying White characters are readily available on classroom bookshelves and for public purchase.

The books that normalize Whiteness and confirm the message from a student’s infancy that White people are held at a higher status and hold more power (and thus portray that it is ultimately better to be White) teach Whiteness as the standard of being. Because literature



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containing White representation is highly accessible, continues to privilege Whites, and over-represents the White race, a focus needs to be placed on literature that represents other races, particularly Biracial students' heritage and culture. Literature which portrays African American and Biracial characters should be just as easily assessable to students as the White-dominated texts. It is important to focus on books that represent Biracial characters, interracial families, and reflect experiences of the Biracial population.

Of course, the quality of the literature also needs to be evaluated before considering adding the texts into a curriculum or library. Unfortunately, no known framework to evaluate Biracial literature exclusively exists. However, after a study conducted by Rudine Sims Bishop (2012), a framework was created to evaluate children's literature by and about African Americans between the years 1965 and 1979. The framework contains the following three categories in which literature may be placed: social conscience, melting pot, and culturally conscious.

The first category, social conscience, concentrated on White children being the focus of these types of books. These books, written mostly by White authors, implied that the primary reader was White and viewed African American children as different and exotic—with stereotypical attributes. Because of this imbalance, White readers were inspired to develop the social conscience. They centered their attention on defusing racial conflicts between Blacks and Whites. During this time, desegregating schools remained a primary focus, which helped ensure that equitable practices were upheld.

The second category focused on melting pot books, meaning the writing recognized both African American and White children as equal. However, the literature only portrayed the skin color of African American children. The books were almost primarily picture books written by

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White authors who offered no more than representation. Although an improvement, melting pot literature is not enough to validate and examine non-White backgrounds.

The third category centralized on culturally conscious books written primarily by African American authors. In contrast to the first two categories, these books portrayed major African American characters and stayed rooted in Black cultural environments. The books incorporated not only physical descriptions of characters and settings but more defined cultural experiences. Books published which depict authentic African American characters may never have the opportunity to sit on a classroom or school's library shelf. The lack of culturally conscious books is due to teachers, librarians, or administrators worrying that "controversial" topics will be questioned by parents or the community. They may also feel that the books are unimportant to include or feel uncomfortable in addressing the topics displayed in this type of literature: "Book challenges have made teachers and librarians into unofficial moral referees with little training, protection, or power" (PEN America, 2016, p. 12). Indeed, the act of soft censorship excludes certain books from the curriculum or classroom bookshelves.

Despite the censorship and inaccurate thoughts about culturally conscious books, these works of literature need to be acknowledged because they promote the development of readers' own identities and peers' identities. Multicultural literature is important to all students, not just for children of minority groups: "Access to diverse books is not just important for children of color. For all children, a crucial part of education is learning about differences, learning to value other cultures, histories, and experiences, and understanding the breadth of experiences that compromise both our own society in the U.S. and wider world" (PEN America, 2016, p. 14). The problem of scarce availability of multicultural literature in schools and bookstores can be viewed through a critical race ideology because it is an issue of social justice.

### **Critical Race Theory**

“Giving voice to the marginalized, counter-stories validate their life circumstances and serve as powerful ways to challenge and subvert the versions of reality held by the privileged.” (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010, p. 217)

Leading social justice initiatives is a key principle of critical race theory. (Ducir & Dixon, 2004). Two central tenants of critical race theory are described in this study to assist in the understanding of racial inequalities within school environments. The two tenants are as follows: the permanence of racism and the centrality of experiential knowledge. The first tenant, the permanence of racism, details the ways that racism is a normal part of our society (Tate, 1997). As stated earlier in this study, racism entails the oppression of a marginalized group. This is important to examine when evaluating multicultural literature for children. Racism and bias are present in all forms of literature, so the same holds true for children’s books.

Moreover, racism is continuing to play a dominant role in deciding educational attainment, resources, and materials for use in today’s classrooms. Literature can be an influential tool to challenge these beliefs and biases: “Literacy analysis that uses CRT describes the myriad ways in which racism operates in the language, character portrayal, and creation of a book” (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013, p. 3). Many challenges within schools hinder the representation of Biracial individuals, as that of all of people of color in children’s literature, and this shows how racism is apparent in the process. Culture, language, life experiences, and authenticity of characters are not present in many of the children’s books within a classroom or library. Publishing rates of books that authentically resonate with students’ cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs do not emulate the practice of authentic inclusion of people of color either.

To support these points, a 2018 Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) survey examined 3,312 titles by U.S. publishers and, only 388 were about African/African Americans;

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284 were about Asian Pacific/Asian Pacific Americans; 240 depicted Latinx, and only 34 portrayed American Indians/First Nations. Obviously, publishing rates are not keeping in pace with the diversity that exists in the U.S. Some suggest that multicultural books do not sell, and therefore they are not being published. Authors from minority groups are often not included in the publication process, and their voices are not being equally represented as compared to mainstream writers. Educators may also feel that only the minority population would benefit from this literature. As a result of this limited thinking, educators refrain from utilizing the works within their classroom, which would impact publishing rates. However, there is still a need for inclusive, rich literary works that embed genuine cultures for inclusion in classrooms and school libraries. Singleton (2006) explains if a school is to be truly equitable “the curriculum is respectful and reflective of the diversity of students’ experiences, backgrounds, and cultures” and that “students see themselves in the curriculum and are encouraged to relate to it personally” (p. 226). To combat this problem, schools need to conduct equity audits of textbooks in order to ensure that high-quality books are used and follow steps to maintain the practice when selecting new books to purchase.

The second tenant, the centrality of experiential knowledge, which details challenging race through counter-storytelling, is equally important to examine. Counter-storytelling is defined by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) as “a method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of acceptable premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144). These stories give voice to marginalized groups and validate their life experiences. Using counter-storytelling can also enable others to view a different culture with more understanding and give them a broader view of the world in which they live. Schools should strive for a goal of

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providing marginalized students of color with stories that validate their experiences—not maintaining the practice of advantaging White students within their literature.

Biracial students can feel marginalized because of singular narratives of their lived experiences being addressed in classroom literature. Biracial individuals must be given the opportunity to share their personal narratives because, as Tate, (1997) explains “(a) reality is socially constructed, (b) stories are powerful means for destroying and changing mind-sets, (c) stories have a community building function, and (d) stories provide members of out-groups mental self-preservation” (p. 219). The inclusion of literature which counteracts negative or stereotypical messages can stimulate and enrich classroom conversation. This dialogue can provide a Biracial student the freedom to express his or her thoughts and feelings about being Biracial today within a supportive environment. The accepted norms and beliefs in children’s literature need to be challenged to provide opportunities for all students to benefit from its inclusion. When these two facets are analyzed and addressed, the teachers can then begin to enable Biracial children to feel validated, accepted, and motivated to read and to ultimately achieve academically. As Ebe (2010) notes, “validating and celebrating students’ backgrounds and cultural experiences can often lead to reading engagement and increased reading proficiency” (p. 196). Literature representation can provide countless opportunities for Biracial students to feel included within school environments.

### **Multicultural Literature Providing Validation, Motivation, and Academic Success**

For Biracial students to develop a positive racial identity and self-confidence, they need to feel validated. This can be achieved through literature representation. Au (2001) argues for all experiences to be represented: “I believe it is important for students of *all* backgrounds to

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read and respond to works of multicultural literature. However, I feel the interaction with these texts is especially important for students of diverse backgrounds” (Culturally Responsive Texts section, para. 2). Willett (1995) also notes that “when children cannot identify with a book or see their lives celebrated through stories, it may have a negative impact on their self-image. The message the children get is that their lives and their stories are not important” (p. 176). To build self-worth, it is imperative for students to be exposed to an authentic understanding of the world in which they live. Literature which visually depicts a Biracial family, identifies the struggle of self-identification, or portrays realistic experiences of a Biracial student can provide a true multicultural experience for all students. The environment of inclusion can stimulate their understanding of diversity and motivate them to want to read more.

A considerable amount of multicultural literature is still needed for students to be exposed to books which prompt them to read. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) note that one “primary motivation for reading fiction involves the pleasure that can be taken in relating to characters, their lives, their problems, and their experiences” (p. 810). The concept of student motivation is emphasized when readers are provided with these essential craft features where “a love of reading will result” (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 810). It is not only motivating to learn more about one’s own culture and take pride in his/her history, but also motivating to learn about other cultures which may be new. The students’ reading engagement will increase as they are more motivated to read literature that they find stimulating. Multicultural literature can encourage students to learn more about diverse cultures, and it in turn expands their thinking and understanding of the world.

One influential study sought to examine the effects of reading multicultural literature aloud to elementary students to track possible mindset shifts. The study wanted to find out if

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multicultural books lead to change in their perspectives of others and increased tolerance. The researchers found that both objectives could be achieved through multicultural literature and critical literacy discussions. The lead researcher, Susan Evans, (2010) conducted a study of a fourth-grade classroom with a diverse student population. Their teacher read aloud picture books, engaged in conversations that encouraged critical thinking and inquiry, and taught journal writing. The books selected were based off the Cooperative Children's Book Center's (2006) established guidelines. These books were chosen because, according to Evans, they encompassed the following traits: "avoided stereotypes, portrayed the values and cultural group in an authentic way, showed people from different cultures working together, emphasized both similarities and differences, broadened children's vision, invited reflections, and showed multiple and contradictory perspectives" (p. 92). After the researchers made conclusions from their data, the findings revealed that the students increased their acceptance and respect of people who were different from them, increased their values and beliefs of different cultures, demonstrated empathy toward others, increased their understanding of their own cultures, valued the experiences of others, and increased their understanding of prejudices, biases, and tolerance. This study demonstrates the importance that multicultural literature plays in the development of a fair and equitable classroom and the future creation of an impartial society: "If we teach students to be literate without helping them to develop a commitment to construct a just and human world, we will foster a nation and world in which there is a threat to justice everywhere" (Evans, 2010, pp. 97-98). This diverse form of literature within the classroom is important on many levels; not only does it motivate students to read, broadens their knowledge, and encourages them to develop emotionally, but it also enables them to flourish academically. As reading interest grows, the more knowledge and exposure to various cultures students will gain.

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In contrast, a classroom that does not contain a mixture of races and cultures can hinder the students' academic success. Gangi (2008) argues that children need to read books which reflect their culture so that they may begin the process of developing into proficient readers (p. 30). Students may not be able to connect with the literature if their culture is not recognized; thus, their interest and comprehension of the text may be lost. Both print and illustrations can be utilized to expose their lives, cultures, and identities in authentic ways. The instructional process will enable students to become more actively engaged in the reading and, because their cultures are represented, will enable them to build background knowledge that provides them with a higher level of academic achievement.

Students are more open to reading and engagement when they see themselves in books. In this vein, Ebe (2010) argues for multicultural literature and exposing students to new ideas: "I find that students tend to do poorly on reading assessments when they cannot relate to or bring background knowledge to the text they are asked to read" (p. 194). Teachers are responsible for helping to build this contextual awareness using literature of a diverse nature. Because Biracial students face different life experiences and social interactions than their monoracial peers, their backgrounds may not be relatable, which can affect their comprehension of literature.

Students need to make personal connections to the literature for them to comprehend and make sense of its meaning. Ogletree (2014) asserts that "using multicultural literature in the classroom is one way to build momentum in a student's academic success" (p. 1). Not only can students who are exposed to this type of literature achieve academically, but this reading can help them with application skills. For instance, students will be able to identify and point out bias and prejudice in literature and act to resolve some of the issues associated with race due to their respect for different cultures. This is the highest level, the Social Action Approach, of the



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model James Banks (1989) developed for the integration of multicultural content into curriculum. This is also the level that educators must strive to achieve.

Numerous criteria for selection of authentic, accurate multicultural literature has been developed over the years. Books have been synthesized into a wider array of sections, ranging from the lowest level of integration of cultural consciousness to the highest. The lowest levels only involve focusing on holidays, food, and traditions of various races, which is the least effective approach. This approach provides little insight into a culture and does not focus on the significance to minority groups. The next level is practiced when materials are added to the existing curriculum but without enough discussion and an upholding of the mainstream perspective. This level's approach is viewed from the lenses of Mainstream-Centric and Euro-Centric authors, and it does not enable students to understand society from different cultural perspectives.

The highest level of culturally conscious literature is achieved when the curriculum structure changes and provides students with a deeper understanding of a culture. This method challenges the students to think critically and view the world from multiple perspectives, the highest level of attainment. During this level, students explore problems related to equity; they are also encouraged to problem-solve to make changes or take action to improve conditions within their school or community. In this level, teachers benefit the most from implementing critical literacy strategies to merge thought-provoking, meaningful literature with strategies that address racial inequities, help to support Biracial students' positive racial identities, and encourage students to feel empowered to act upon injustices.

Multicultural literature in the classroom is one piece of the puzzle to develop a positive racial identity for Biracial students. Research suggests that the literature needs to be integrated

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with critical literacy strategies to enable all students to critique the text and encourage them to think differently. Critical literacy will also influence positive social justice initiatives.

Multicultural literature or critical literacy strategies alone cannot bring about the most impactful changes. Experts acknowledge the links to the representation of multicultural literature and the way it is utilized that achieves the most meaningful changes. Norton (2013) cautions educators and those involved in students' lives, "merely placing the literature in a classroom or library shelf without subsequent interaction does not change attitudes" (p. 2). School educators need to extend the literary materials they utilize and include critical literacy skills in order for the students to truly benefit. The following section details the advantages of utilizing critical literacy skills.

### Critical Literacy Skills

"The more children know about the seriousness of racial-ethnic oppression and its consequences, the more they will be equipped to contest it in their present and future lives."

— Debra Van Ausdale & Joe Feagin,  
*The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism*, 2001

Blending multicultural literature with critical literacy will expose students to a Biracial person's racial background, as well as other diverse cultures, so they may gain a deeper understanding and analyze the intent of authors while also promoting social justice initiatives. When students read, they can take away important aspects of the story, often unknowingly. Students "consume the social messages about culture imbedded within" (Campbell Naidoo, 2014, p. 9). The tremendous body of research on critical literacy skills makes it clear that its utilization can help students see the need to advocate for equity for all populations. The blending of the multicultural literature and critical literacy skills can "combat intolerance and foster a

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sense of inclusion and...fundamentally change education and society” (Cai & Bishop, 1994, p. 58). Lazar and Offenbergl (2011) explain that “the collection of literature in a classroom and the ways teachers facilitate discussions of these texts can ultimately affect children's attitudes and their capacity to act (or not to act) and dismantling racism” (p. 282). Examining text through a critical lens assists readers in all grade levels to engage in critical literacy skills; these skills allow students to be successful at challenging views presented in texts. Critical literacy, according to Luke (2004), “involves second-guessing, reading against the grain, asking hard and harder questions, seeing underneath, behind, and beyond texts, trying to see and ‘call’ how these texts establish and use power over us, over others, on whose behalf, in whose interests” (p. 4). If students acquire critical literacy skills, they will become more aware, thoughtful readers and thinkers.

Anwaruddin (2016) explains the importance of the way texts are approached with the statement, “Language and literacy education have focused on the reading and writing of text without paying significant attention to how text and various approaches to reading and writing then position the subject” (p. 383). Students need to be text critics and change their reading habits to move beyond only reading for comprehension: “With the ready availability of technology and traditional media, today’s society is more text rich than it has ever been and readers are exposed to a range of ideologies, values, and perspectives” (Forest & Kimmel, 2016, p. 283). Today’s students need to be prepared to address complex issues and attempt to solve them. When thinking about critical literacy, teachers must consider the four dimensions framework. Lewison et al. (2002) proposes a framework which encompasses “...four dimensions: (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) considering multiple viewpoints, (3), focusing on the socio-political, and (4) taking action and advocating for social justice” (p. 382). Critical

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literacy discourse surrounding these dimensions can enable a Biracial student to develop a positive self-identity and help others to understand their perspective.

Teachers play a lead role in the critical literacy process and in building a positive classroom culture. Educators impact students and should be intentional with their instruction and classroom management: “Each utterance, interaction, gesture, or curricular decision, for example, shapes what participants come to know and who participates come to be within their classroom and larger social worlds” (Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006, p. 200). Understanding will emerge when teachers promote critical literacy and acceptance, and students will be motivated to act for equity.

These valuable principles of multiculturalism should be considered in the early years of a student’s education. The longer it takes for children to be exposed to diversity, the more biased opinions they will hold, and it may be a tough challenge to eradicate their prejudices. Through critical literacy, young students can view circumstances in their lives as relatable and find the words to convey an injustice. Educators can encourage students to tackle even the most complicated issues through critical literacy: “Teachers of young children can guide their students through early literacy using critical literacy with a purpose of creating global thinkers who are comfortable dealing with issues and who are actively working toward change” (Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012, p. 59). Teachers need to confidently discuss all issues that are addressed in the literature and foster open discussions in a non-judgmental atmosphere.

It is important that students are exposed to multicultural literature, but equally important for teachers to be comfortable and knowledgeable about discussing sensitive issues within the classroom. These discussions will help students to foster a sense of self and positive attitudes towards other races, ethnicities, and cultures. A lack of this practice can be detrimental in a

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classroom setting. In fact, students who are denied the opportunity to have thoughtful discussions may normalize racism or other unequal power structures.

When students know that school is a significant part of their world, they will experience a more cohesive understanding of the ways they can be a part of transformational change. They will exhibit more self-confidence in discussing racial differences, which will heighten their awareness of racism and prejudices towards Biracial peers. As students grow older, they can disrupt injustices. As Kretovics (1985) explains “critical literacy can stress the need for students to develop a collective vision of what it might be like to live in the best of all societies and how such a vision might be made practical” (p. 51). It is imperative that students are comfortable with and feel the need to advocate for themselves and others in the face of social injustices. Lazar and Offenbergl (2011) note that “within these silent classrooms, the realities and consequences of racism are left unproblematized, contributing to its normalization within society” (p. 276). Thus, it is essential that students are aware and want to fight against injustices.

When students are aware and want to fight against social injustice, they can take action in a multitude of ways. Action can include, as Van Sluys (2005) proposes, “reading resistantly, communicating new lines of thinking, and pushing others to question how they come to see the world” (p. 22-23). When students identify and understand injustices, they respond to them confidently with actionable wisdom. For students to begin taking necessary action, teachers need to help them change the way they read and view literature, then build upon this knowledge through discussion. Evans (2010) affirms these steps: “within the framework of critical literacy, the selection of text and use of open discussions are of utmost importance in the utilization of multicultural literature” (p. 90). Teachers must facilitate a classroom culture that is trusting by engaging the students in critical literacy discourse.

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After understanding the principles of critical literacy, teachers must then teach these strategies to their students. There are a host of strategies to analyze the messages in texts to question bias, stereotypes, assumptions, and discrimination, thus promoting equity for marginalized populations. For Biracial students most importantly, strategies tailored to their experiences allow them to become decision-makers in their learning, distill self-confidence, and empower them to confront inequalities.

Social justice can be viewed in many ways, but the core principles remain focused on “challenging the inequities of school and society” (Cochran-Smith, Gleeson, & Mitchell, 2010, p. 37). Problem-posing can help accomplish this goal of confronting unfairness. In fact, problem-posing is a versatile strategy which asks questions about the text and its meaning. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) generate examples of problem-posing questions. Questions to critically engage students include the following:

- Whose voices are heard, and whose voices are marginalized?
- What does the author want us to think?
- What would be an alternative view?
- What action can we take to promote equity?
- What are the author’s intentions and beliefs?

According to Norris, Lucas, and Prudhoe (2012), the “problem-posing method leads students of any age, experience, or ability level to use new learning of personal experience in a way that encourages critical reflection and focuses on active participation” (p. 60).

Juxtaposition is a second effective strategy. This strategy enables students to analyze the point of view in a text. Texts on similar subjects are compared and contrasted in order to analyze the authors’ bias. This strategy can also be utilized with photos or pictures. Two photos can be

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examined and discussed from a critical stance. Students need to understand juxtaposition to expose minority views that are not represented and use that knowledge to take action for social injustices. Juxtaposition is useful “to help the reader disrupt the commonplace and see the text in a different way” (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 50). By seeing the text in a different way promotes new thinking and ideas.

Thirdly, switching is a strategy that empowers students to consider alternative perspectives. Not only can an ethnic/race switch be incorporated after reading the text, but readers can switch several details. Examples of switching can include altering gender, setting, theme, or a language. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) explain that switching inquiries “encourages the students to extend their understanding of power relationships and take action to promote social justice” (p. 49). Beyond discussion of changing, writing an alternative text can also be successful in representing a different perspective than the one the student has read. Examples of alternative texts can also be represented either visually or orally through plays, poetry, songs, or posters. The students need time to utilize these strategies consistently so that they may become familiar with the procedures. Students then can begin to reflect upon their experiences using the literacy lesson framework.

McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) developed four features of critical literacy. These experts state that “when students are comfortable using one or more Critical Literacy strategies, we organize our lessons using the literacy lesson framework” (p. 38). They propose four components within this framework: teachers engage students’ thinking, teachers guide students’ thinking, teachers extend students’ thinking, and teacher’s reflection upon the lesson. Teachers can facilitate this framework in many ways. For instance, through close analysis, students will be able to read beyond the texts to gain valuable insights which may have been lost otherwise.

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Close analysis and close reading allow students to give voice to marginalized populations and respond to inequity in transformational ways.

Students must grow from being passive readers to critically literate readers, to embrace the opportunities which challenge them to analyze texts—instead of just take the words at face value. To be critically literate, readers must grasp that texts are not “true,” but rather that they “represent the perspectives of the writer and the socio-cultural times in which they were written” (Lapp & Fisher, 2010, p. 159). Critical literacy serves to help readers promote social justice initiatives through deliberate discussions, questions, and thought-provoking activities. Research demonstrates the need for teachers to combine this process with literature to invite student inquiry and reflection on issues of equity. Evans (2010) illuminated this concept in the following statement:

Although literacy instruction is a major component within all curricula at the elementary level, implementation of new critical literacy practices with multicultural literature may provide teachers and students with the tools to ask tough questions about fairness, justice, and equality in their schools and community in order to help create the multicultural society we need (p. 88)

With this integration of literature and critical literacy skills, all students are given an equal opportunity to learn. Only then can meaningful changes occur within the classroom culture.

Not only can students be exposed to and gain a deeper understanding of a Biracial individual’s cultural background (as well as other diverse cultures), they can analyze the intent of authors through the blending of multicultural literature and critical literacy to promote social justice initiatives that can make a lasting impact on future generations. The classroom, however, is not the ending point of fostering a Biracial student’s positive identity and supporting the



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diversity of all students. Students find that their school librarian and the library environment can be a source of an abundance of information to support their learning. Libraries offer a diverse collection of materials and rewarding, engaging opportunities which address equitable practices.

School librarians can also serve as advocates for the use of equitable resources, learning environments, and teaching practices which support student diversity. These professional staff members are in an optimal position to garner support for students through advocacy efforts and networks to ensure students receive necessary required resources: “School librarians need an advocacy network, especially when challenges or possible solutions undermine the potential of the school librarian and library program to serve the literacy learning and resource needs of students, classroom teachers, and families” (Moreillon, 2018, p. 133). School librarians can lead this effort by serving in a leadership capacity. In fact, Moreillon urges that librarians’ guidance is pivotal: “For today’s future ready school librarians, building a coalition of support grows directly from the leadership role they take in their schools (p. 135). Librarians’ leadership skills within the school library are demonstrated through their ability and willingness to change their roles and the library environment when needed.

### **The Changing Roles of the School Librarian and Library Environments**

“Advocacy is a story that is created, developed, and told in the everyday practices of the school librarian and the library staff.” (Moreillon, 2015)

The roles of school librarians and the library environment are changing with the diversity of the student population. School librarians are reshaping their collections and programs to meet the needs of the shifting student demographics. They acknowledge the need for diversity within their collections and programs as an important aspect of their position. The School Library Journal (2018) surveyed 1,156 school and public librarians within the United States and Canada

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and found that 81% of librarians find it very important to carry a diverse selection of books for students. In addition, 72% of librarians made it a personal goal to create diverse collections. If a student is not able to access these resources within the classroom, the school library needs to be a vital option for them. No longer is the school library viewed as a place to merely choose a book from its collection of literature, but as a centralized hub of information, materials, and opportunities that reflect equitable practices.

The National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries (2018) entail six Shared Foundations: Include, Inquire, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage. These standards address making equity a value embedded in all aspects of the centralized hubs within our schools. School librarians have an opportunity to interact with all students and teachers within a school; therefore, they hold an influential role. Agosto (2007) explains the impact of librarians: “Because the school librarian is a central part of the school, cutting across classroom and grade-level boundaries, teacher-librarians are in ideal positions for effecting attitudinal change throughout the school” (p. 28). School librarians can indeed facilitate cultural transformations within their school environments: “School librarians have the responsibility as well as the opportunity to ensure choice, voice, inclusion, and equity in students’ school-based literacy learning experiences” (Moreillon, 2018, p. 57). These valuable staff members can act as an equalizer for student learning and social justice issues, as long as they are aware of their role in transformative change.

Notably, school librarians are advocating at a higher rate than ever before. In a study conducted by Ewbank and Kwon (2015), they found that school librarians (or an individual in the school library field) initiated 83% of advocacy activities. Within these environments, school librarians collaborate with teachers, students, parents, and community members to ensure that

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they are creating a multicultural library which accurately reflects all cultures and appeals to all audiences. Every school librarian can be a crucial resource for students and a “natural source of support, providing help with academic assignments, becoming a mediator of information, and sharing resources with those students who may be experiencing challenging situations” (Harper, 2017, p. 43). Likewise, school libraries can be viewed as welcome additions to the classroom: “The school library can provide the ‘space’ outside the pressures of the classroom” (Harper, 2017, p. 43). By offering space for raw interactions with culturally explorative texts, libraries can cause a transformational shift. In fact, school librarians can support diversity and adhere to The National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries by viewing their role through an equity-focused lens and by providing the opportunity to access an abundance of information, to support learning, to provide a diverse collection of materials, and to implement rewarding, engaging opportunities.

### **School Libraries: Information, Materials, and Opportunities**

“School librarians who serve as literacy leaders in their schools build library-classroom connections by collecting and curating diverse resources.” (Moreillon, 2018, p. 57)

“To lead, school librarians involve the entire school community in establishing and sustaining a culture of reading.” (Moreillon, 2018, p. 54)

For some students, the information and materials accessed from the school library may be their only means of attaining content. Many students rely on their school library, which means each library should be composed of a rich selection of superior books. By exposing students to information and materials they normally would not have access to otherwise, the library creates greater literacy results—while sparking imagination and curiosity. Research proves that, when children have access to print materials, they have greater academic and psychological gains.

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According to the Scholastic Teacher and Principal School Report (2016), 46% of teachers and 46% of principals report that fiction/nonfiction books are not adequately available to students within the home. The report also confirms that 48% of teachers and 39% of principals believe that access to the Internet, along with other materials outside of school, is not adequately available to students. This lack of resources hinders the students' access to information and technology required to be successful in and out of school.

Advocates can view information literacy as a human right. The American Library Association's Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989) summarizes in its Final Report the difficulties people experience when they do not have access to dependable information. The report also examines those who lack the skills needed to evaluate information. The report explains that this access is "a means of personal empowerment" (section 2, para. 4). School librarians can advocate for this stance by providing all students with the opportunity to access reliable, diverse information. Denying this access is engaging in inequitable practices, which have been maintained for centuries due to critical race theory ideologies. Access to reliable sources of information empowers one to evaluate, question, reflect, and analyze—all higher-order thinking skills. These skills are necessary to provide students with a foundation to function within today's diverse society and act as informed global citizens.

School librarians hold a source of great power; they decide which books to purchase and promote and which titles they will not stock on shelves. Their actions can either promote greater achievement or impede student growth. They must embrace the opportunity to learn more about their students and support this effort through a rich collection of resources. Whether it is required reading or through self-selection, excellent multicultural books are stories which allow students to learn from and be entertained by. To promote successful reading, school librarians

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need to pay close attention to ensure their selections are inviting. The chosen titles should draw readers in.

Previous research indicates that children who have the opportunity to independently choose books to read and have access to diverse materials are more motivated to read and showcase improved reading skills. According to the Scholastic Teacher and Principal Report (2016), teachers and principals recognize the importance of students independently reading a book of their choice, and 94% agree that students should be provided independent reading time. Research has also shown that scores on reading assessments increase with the number of library visits by a student. In a study conducted by Francis, Lance, and Lietzau (2010), the researchers found that when elementary students utilized the school library more often, they performed better on reading assessments. Proponents insist that school library collections should provide an enriching environment to students, giving them access to diverse materials to support their growth. The library should include books that not only reflect the shifting demographics of the school and community, but also include texts which are in stark contrast to the perceived norms, such as “window” or “door” texts and “mirror” texts, as described earlier.

Clearly, all students need to be encouraged to read on a broader scale in order to gain a deeper understanding of others’ perspectives. Not doing so can suggest a bias point of view. Denying students the chance to experience a variety of literature sends the message that learning about different cultures and perspectives is not important for them. Supplying primarily ethnocentric collections is devaluing students’ education, not providing students an opportunity to develop empathy toward others. It may even cause disinterest, bias, or prejudice due to ignorance. Books, magazines, eBooks, computers, and library programs are forms of diverse resources that can foster student growth. When librarians acknowledge and value student

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diversity, they commit themselves to building a collection of resources that reflects diversity. This practice not only supports academic advancement, but it helps build positive self-esteem and self-identity within students.

Of course, school library shelves need to be filled with a balance of fiction, non-fiction, historical, contemporary, high-level and low-level books in all genres. The texts should reflect the abilities and interests of all students and represent races and cultures in an authentic, unbiased manner. No matter the genre, these resources can help students to fully navigate social interactions by increasing their insight to a broad range of information and viewpoints. Moreillon (2013) argues that every genre can have a beneficial impact: “All types of cultural literature are necessary to prepare youth for living effectively, thoughtfully, and consciously in an increasingly interconnected world” (p. 36). By assessing the needs of the school community and the community at large, school librarians can help to bridge the resource and opportunity gaps for their students, which will strengthen their intellect and moral systems.

Moreillon (2018) describes the collaboration between the librarian and their colleagues as confirming “the effective integration of children’s and young adult literature representing divergent perspectives, in all genres, at various reading proficiency levels, and in multiple formats” (p. 54). Various genres expose students to stories of all nature, allowing them to learn not only about diverse cultures, but to welcome unique mediums. Access to a diverse collection of materials can foster academic, social, and emotional growth within students. In fact, Hunsinger (2015) argues how strong librarians can fuel student growth “by guaranteeing that *every* student has the right to read and receive (or have access to) information and educational opportunities” (p. E11). She expands this concept by recommending that school library collections contain high-interest, low-level books so that readers who are below grade level can

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still have access to books that they are able to read and find intriguing. Under these ideal library conditions, students can independently choose books that interest them with no judgment, questioning, or needed explanations. Sonnerberg (2017) describes this student freedom within a library: “All are free to study what they wish, not only what they must, in a library” (p. 18). This freedom can empower students to be active, confident readers and learners.

The school librarian provides opportunities for both students and teachers to grow. For some students, the school library is the first library experience they will have—and sometimes the only library that they may access freely: “For many students, the library space and freedom of choice ensures they have a positive and affirming experience in school” (Harper, 2017, p. 51). To promote student independence and positive energy, books and materials need to be utilized instead of merely occupying shelf space. Librarians have a duty to respond to students’ distinctive needs and offer vast reading materials. Likewise, librarians can help to provide these opportunities to students and teach them the skills necessary to become readers who can apply critical literacy skills; thoughtfulness will allow students to deeply comprehend texts.

Furthermore, school librarians can spark curiosity and imagination when they provide opportunities for students to interact with texts that reflect their own culture and texts that which represent others’ cultures. They can introduce students to authors and speakers so they may build connections with the author, books, and each other. These interactions can create excitement in reading and writing. “Window” and “mirror” texts can also instill how to understand others’ perspectives, as they teach them the importance of diversity not only within literature, but within society. Here, the school librarian can lead the movement for a culturally responsive environment that models equitable practices and provides a wide array of perspectives for all students, especially those who have been traditionally marginalized.

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As stated earlier in the study, Biracial students typically are viewed as a marginalized group. The concept of marginalization for Biracial students can be reflected through limited books and materials within libraries. The School Library Journal's Diverse Book Collections Survey (2018) contends that 68% of librarians report that books with authentic Biracial/multiracial characters are in demand within their libraries, but 46% of librarians find this representation difficult to locate. Thus, librarians can foster community within schools by advocating for more multicultural literature and inclusive practices, such as dispelling stereotypes and prejudices. Summers (2010) describes the school librarian as a stake holder "in dispelling any myths and prejudices that may exist in a school by learning more about the students' language, learning styles, and values" (p. 12) who can be a "primary voice in promoting the importance of social equity for all students" (p. 10). The rich array of opportunities afforded by the librarian and library environment can meet the individual needs of all students within an inclusive setting: "Teacher librarians can prepare students to be responsible consumers of information throughout their lives, not just in libraries, by encouraging them to engage with a wide variety of texts, formats, and ideas" (Friese, 2008, p. 68). The school library can act to help build a community not only of learners, but a community of *lifelong* learners.

Besides students, teachers can also benefit from the curriculum and practices that school librarians provide. Librarians can support teachers by assisting with lesson planning and team teaching, as well as recommending materials for classroom use; in this manner, librarians can certify diverse materials are being utilized in classrooms. Moreillon (2018) explains the benefits of cooperation amongst school personnel: "When school librarians collaborate with classroom teachers and specialists, they can ensure that each reader has opportunities and the necessary skills to access and make sense of texts in all formats" (p. 57). Librarians and teachers can



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further collaborate with all school staff to enhance parent and community participation to address community needs. The impact of librarians and school staff members can move from students to the world outside school walls.

Although school libraries were once viewed as a book repository, its role and that of the school librarian is changing and evolving with the diversity of students. The modern school library is becoming a centralized hub of information, materials, and opportunities which reflects equitable practices: “In this evolving environment, school librarians have a unique, urgent role and an unparalleled opportunity to build connections for learning” (Moreillon, 2018, p. 1).

However, this still may not ring true for many schools in the United States. If given the urgent intention it deserves, this call for diverse literature will bring significant ideals to the forefront in all schools for all students.

The circumstances are conducive for school librarians to position themselves as leaders for equity. In fact, school librarians can serve as instructional leaders who assess their students’ needs and provide the skills and materials necessary for them to act as informed global citizens. These well-informed students will understand their own roles in society and approach others with empathy and acceptance, creating a more harmonious and intelligent world through this dynamic space where one is able to share another’s perspective, understand their world views, and be knowledgeable about taking action to transform society, as Mirra (2018) shares: “Once students can imagine a range of possible worlds, they are better prepared to begin building the ones they want to see” (p. 5). These positive interpersonal encounters and experiences are important for not only Biracial students, but for all students, for books and librarians support the development of positive self-identity and make students feel like valued members of the school community and our large, diverse society. All students have stories to relate about their lived

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experiences; not only are these stories an opportunity for their voice to be heard, but an opportunity to be understood and acknowledged.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Rationale for the Study**

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology applied during this study using a grounded theory approach. The following research is a qualitative investigation which will examine school librarians' use of multicultural literature, their perspectives on the influence of multicultural literature on students' acceptance and understanding of diversity, and their role in advocacy efforts as part of their professional responsibilities. This study is necessary because Biracial and non-White individuals are members of a marginalized population; Biracial students can experience acts of social injustices, which makes this problem of practice critical to investigate.

Racial identity development is an essential factor to consider in the education of students of color (Carter & Goodwin, 1994; McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Because there is a relationship between one's physical appearance and their identity (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002), a Biracial individual may be viewed as Black by many White people (Khanna, 2011). Therefore, Biracial students can easily experience acts of racism and prejudice. These behaviors can create negative racial identities, impede academic achievement, and perpetuate a lack of understanding and empathy for Biracial students. So far, this work has analyzed critical race theory, multicultural literature, critical literacy, and Biracial identity to develop a thorough understanding of the social, cultural, and historical perspectives of the current problem of practice. By addressing these issues, we can produce more equitable educational opportunities for this emerging population of students within school districts across America.

### **Grounded Theory Through a Qualitative Investigation**

I will utilize a grounded theory approach during this study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), grounded theory is a “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process” (p.12). I have chosen this methodology because it is the most logical option. Throughout the study, I will collect and analyze qualitative data to construct theories which demonstrates the framework that “summarizes the interplay and movement between methods and processes that underpin the generation of a GT” (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019, p. 3). Furthermore, a qualitative investigation will be utilized because the findings of the study are not derived through statistical methods that are found in quantitative research. The findings will be obtained through the data collected during the research process, not through definitive data or distinct research strategies (Zakai, 2002) or inferred theories or hypotheses (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). There are many advantages of utilizing a qualitative approach during research. To start, it is valuable to educational reform. Cooley (2013) presented the case for qualitative research in education and provided strategies which can be utilized “to improve the relevance and impact qualitative researchers’ work on reframing educational policy at local, state, and federal levels to meet the demands of equality and social justice” (p. 247). Implementing a qualitative approach allows the researcher to investigate the actions, attitudes, and feelings of participants, thus providing a rich, detailed account of their responses.

My logic behind choosing this method centers on first-hand accounts from those involved most closely with the topic of supporting Biracial students in school libraries. I will encourage the participants to expand upon their responses during open-ended questioning through the form of interviews. This format allows the researcher to explore new insights into the problem of

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practice and to offer recommendations which will help improve the quality of educational opportunities for Biracial students.

### **Research Questions**

Relevant literature in the areas of my topic guided the design of the following research questions:

1. How do school librarians select, promote, and utilize multicultural literature within an educational setting?
2. In what ways does the school librarian believe that multicultural literature influences students' understanding and acceptance of diversity?
3. How do school librarians understand advocacy as a part of their professional responsibility?

Kinmond (2012) explains to prospective researchers that if one has “coherence between your research question, method and analytic framework, your analytic approach will determine what kinds of methods are appropriate for you to use” (p. 31). I therefore concluded that my set of research questions is situated for a qualitative approach.

Additionally, Kinmond finds the following:

Strong research questions should pass the ‘so what’ test. That is, what is the potential benefit of answering the research question? Does it matter? Will it actually say anything? If you cannot make a definitive statement about the purpose of your research, it is unlikely to become an excellent qualitative project. (p. 34)

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I believe all my questions stated above have meaningful “so what?” answers. In fact, I provided my central rationale for the basis of this study at the beginning of Chapter 3: because there will be benefits for all students, educators, and school staff members involved.

### **Identification and Selection of Participants**

Upon approval from the Duquesne University IRB, I will utilize my position as a Special Education teacher who has a comprehensive background in English Language Arts to preselect participants. As I work in a public school district in Pennsylvania, I can enlist the assistance of some excellent possible participants. The prospective participants will be recruited through purposive sampling, which is widely used to select participants who fit the criteria consistent with a set of distinct research questions (Berg, 2009). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) detail purposeful sampling as choosing “particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of developing theory” (p. 67). Due to the nature of the study’s topics and the participants’ knowledge and expertise, the participants will be carefully selected through predetermined criteria.

The predetermined criteria will include the following: must be employed in the same school for at least a year and must be a librarian for students in kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Prospective participants will receive an informed consent form via e-mail or in person from the researcher during the initial contact. The consent form will detail the risks, benefits, compensation, and other conditions of their participation regarding the study. Candidates will be informed that no identifying information will be shared regarding their participation, and their names and the schools in which they work will remain anonymous. The researcher is also required to inform prospective participants of how the information will be protected and stored.

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I will assure them that all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and on my computer with password protection. Prospective participants will then be given three days to decide whether to participate in the study, and they will be encouraged to ask questions at any given time. After the third day, I will select a sample of four to six librarians and inform them of my decision for participation.

Following verification, I will coordinate and organize a mutual meeting time, date, and location for the interview sessions. I will encourage the participants to select a meeting location where they feel comfortable speaking about the study's topic, which should diminish any nervousness, they may have about participating. Before beginning the study, I will determine that the informed consent form is signed, answer the questions they still may have, reiterate that there is no known risk to them, and review their rights as participants. I will point out that they can withdraw at any time during the study, as it is strictly on a volunteer basis. Then I will again thoroughly explain the purpose of the study and review the central research questions prior to beginning the interview. Reviewing the questions with them ahead of time will familiarize participants with the interview's scope.

### **Qualitative Measures**

I will record the sessions using digital audio recordings, which will be transcribed verbatim by a transcription service I will use during data analysis. The research questions will best be explained by in-depth, semi-structured interviews of four to six school librarians who work with kindergarteners through sixth graders. Alshenqeeti (2014) describes the usefulness of interviewing as working "to broaden the scope of understanding investigated phenomena" (p. 40). To extend my perception, I will interview the participants during the fall 2019 semester

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through audiotaped recording sessions. A guide of both open and closed-ended interview questions will be implemented; all questions will be centered on the research questions and topics of the intended study. The interview questions are as follows:

How do you choose what types of books are purchased for the library, and how do they reflect your students' demographics?

What do you believe to be the benefits of multicultural literature?

What do you believe are challenges of utilizing multicultural literature?

Are you aware of books portraying biracial characters within your library and, more specifically, African American and White?

Do you believe it is important to include and promote these types of books and can you explain why?

How do you promote your library's multicultural collection?

How do you utilize your library's multicultural collection?

In what ways do you believe that multicultural literature influences students' understanding and acceptance of diversity?

Do you teach students to identify instances of racist, prejudice, or bias messages that are sometimes implicit within literature?

How do you understand advocacy as part of your professional responsibility?

In what ways, if any, do you foster students understanding of racial equity and social justice through literature and educational strategies that you may use to promote students' advocacy of these issues?

Do you have any questions or comments about related topics that we have not discussed, or would you like to elaborate on something that has been discussed?



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The interview guide with these preliminary questions will prepare me for the conversations and serve as a tool for follow-up questions and clarification of answers. The flexible format of questions allows the discussion to change with the direction and scope of the interviews and interviewees as needed. Adams (2015) notes that interviews cannot be fully pre-planned: “Once developed, the interview guide, no matter how extensive its preparation, should still be considered a work in progress” (p. 499). The interview guide is just an outline. In the interviews, I will focus on the participants’ thinking and understanding of the topics to formulate new questions. After all, the goal of my study is to gain a better understanding of the participants’ perspectives and hopefully learn new, illuminating information. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) even state that the “goal of understanding how the person you are interviewing thinks is at the center of the interview” (p. 102). They suggest treating your interviewee as the expert on the topic of the study, which is why I will choose the participants through purposive sampling.

During the interviews, I will also take field notes in the form of written notes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), field notes are “the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (p. 116). Through this indispensable interview process, I will gather rich data. Charmaz (2014) describes rich data as “detailed, focused, and full” (p. 23). At the end of the interview, I will allow the participants to ask any questions about the study or to elaborate on topics they feel are meaningful. After the interview session has ended, I will write a summary of main ideas. The purpose of taking field notes is to ensure the accuracy of the data, instead of relying on my recall of important information. The researcher in a study follows the strict, ethical procedures which are outlined by the Instructional Review Board; therefore, I will guarantee integrity of the research. It is the researcher’s responsibility to be unbiased, transparent, and trustworthy, and to

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produce valid results. To produce valid results, I plan to develop a coding system during data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The purposeful sampling and interviews of experienced school librarians will allow me to gather initial data to generate codes and categories. I will then use line-by-line coding of the initial data gathered. Initial coding will enable me to find similarities and differences within the data. I will seek to identify relevant words and phrases and label them accordingly. Charmaz (2006) notes the importance of keeping the codes related to the data gathered. This process of coding will support me in assigning meaning to the data and will guide the direction of the analysis in order to seek answers to the research questions.

The coding process will proceed into the intermediate phase, where patterns begin to emerge. During this stage, I intend to refine the analysis and identify relationships found between the categories. The data will be analyzed until no new data is found, thus ensuring theoretical saturation (Birks & Mills, 2015). I will utilize advanced coding strategies described by Birks and Mills as “techniques used to facilitate integration of the final grounded theory” (p. 177). Thus, I will construct a theory which is grounded in the data that I gather and analyze.

It is my intention to yield a study based on a problem of practice which captures the beliefs, feelings, and actions of kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade school librarians who are in a direct position to advocate for Biracial students through the library environment. Once the study concludes, all field notes utilized during the study will be discarded in a paper shredder, and the digital recordings will be deleted from my computer. Using this prized qualitative data, my recommendations will be constructed. The recommendations will ensure that librarians are

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aware of resources and strategies they can employ on the behalf of students, all of whom are dependent upon their expertise and decisions. The following chapters report on the findings of the study followed by these recommendations.

## CHAPTER 4

### DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

The primary focus of this study was to gain a greater understanding of school librarians' beliefs and perceptions of multicultural literature. More specifically, my study was intended to better understand how librarians perceive their role in creating a more inclusive literary climate for Biracial students. Ultimately, this study began from the premise that librarians' enhanced knowledge and activism can benefit all students, particularly those of diverse races. This study describes the experiences and beliefs of four elementary librarians as determined through semi-structured interviews. These four professional staff members are employed by Southwestern Pennsylvania schools that serve grades K through 6<sup>th</sup>. I had set out to interview four to six librarians in an effort to gain a deep analysis of the research questions, and I utilized my position as a teacher to find participants. In my efforts, I only had four librarians respond to my inquiries. I feel that this is a data point within itself. Perhaps if it was believed that my research was a concern for Biracial students, I would have had more librarians reply to my request for interviews. I was, however, fortunate for the following librarians to give their time and consideration in order to contribute to the field of education.

Information to describe the four participants and their elementary schools is summarized below. In an effort to assist in protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities, they were given pseudonyms. I will also only report pertinent information about the schools' student demographics (Black, White, and two or more races) which may be related to this study and other information which may contribute to a better understanding of the schools in which the librarians work.

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Katerina is a librarian in a predominately White, suburban school which has an enrollment of almost 500 students. The student demographics within her school are described as follows: 94% White, 1% Black, and 3% two or more races. There are 12% of students who are considered within the low-income guidelines.

Jessie is a librarian in a predominantly Black, urban school which has an enrollment of approximately 100 students, and she has been a librarian for the past 20 years. The student demographics are as follows: 87% Black, 8% White, and 4% two or more races. All students within her school receive free lunches.

Velma is a librarian in a predominantly White, rural school which has an enrollment of approximately 400 students. She has been a librarian for the past 24 years. The student demographics in her school are as follows: 98% White, 2% two or more races, and <1% Black. Thirty-five percent of students are considered from low income households according to guidelines.

Sandy is a librarian in an urban school with an enrollment of approximately 300 students. She has been a librarian for the past 29 years. The demographics for the students she serves are as follows: 45% White, 40% Black, and 10% two or more races. Sixty-three percent of students are considered from low income households according to guidelines.

After collecting the data, I determined commonalities by analyzing the librarians' responses to the interview questions. The three research questions which governed this study are:

1. How do school librarians select, promote, and utilize multicultural literature within an educational setting?
2. In what ways does the school librarian believe that multicultural literature influences students' understanding and acceptance of diversity?

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3. How do school librarians understand advocacy as a part of their professional responsibility?

Upon analyzing and summarizing the librarians' responses to the interview questions, the following themes and subthemes emerged, as defined in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes

<b>Utilizing and Promoting Multicultural Literature</b>	<b>Expanding the Students' Worldview</b>	<b>Lack of Student Familiarity and Interest</b>	<b>Overcoming Challenges</b>	<b>Multiculturalism</b>
Students as Important Determinants for Book Selections	Building Positive Attitudes on Diversity through Literature	Understanding and Acceptance of Diversity	Advocacy of School Librarians	Literature Reflecting Biracial Students
Promotion of Multicultural Literature is Important				

The themes will be individually described; themes were accrued from the data analysis and relate to multicultural literature and the role of the school librarian. To confirm my findings, I utilized direct quotes from the school librarians during the interview sessions.

### **Utilizing and Promoting Multicultural Literature**

#### **Students as Important Determinants for Book Selections**

One of the major themes that reflect the perspectives of the participants is the utilization of multicultural literature. Among the outstanding subtheme under this main theme is that books are usually selected and utilized according to their value in reflecting their students' experiences

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and cultures. The selection of multicultural literature within the school library can be defined as the way in which literature is chosen by the librarian. This theme reflects Sims Bishop's concept of "mirrors and windows" where she expresses the need for children to see themselves reflected within literature as a way to gain a greater self-affirmation.

Katerina referenced this idea when she explained how she makes conscious efforts to purchase books which reflect her students' demographics when selecting books for her library. She stated that books "should show a mirror of yourself." Katerina went on to explain how she strives to ensure that all of her students' backgrounds are represented through authentic literature she has within her collection. She offered the following account:

It's easier in the upper grades because they're much more willing to approach some of the hot button issues. There are also better books that are available for that. I think representation is super important, and I think it's really important for that representation to be there from Kindergarten and up. There are becoming a lot more multicultural books available that are good and that are authentic.

Katerina stated that she has so many different ethnicities and races represented in her school and considers that "constantly with every purchase" that she makes. She stressed the fact that she is cognizant of using a book that features a character or an experience from a minority group where there is only one minority in the classroom because she does not want that student to feel singled out or uncomfortable during discussions. Katerina offered that she also utilizes other means in order to ensure the shelves of her library are filled with diverse, up to date books which are in good condition that meet the needs of students and teachers alike. She mentioned how she purchases books for the library based on what teachers need or require for their lessons. She weeds collections, which in the library world means that librarians get rid of titles that are either dated or just haven't been circulated for a while, by utilizing digital tools. These tools help her determine possible gaps in the collection or what areas are really old and need updating. She is

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then able to purchase the books which need to be replaced due to wear and tear or age. This will help to ensure that students are provided with current books that the students can relate to more easily and with books that are eye-catching and in good reading condition.

Likewise, Jessie stated that students who see themselves as the characters in the book open them up to relating to the literature. In her statement, she elaborated on the idea of how not only do students see themselves in the literature, but the literature also reflects their experiences. She described how she determines what problems the students are facing in their lives and how she tries “to find books that match” their circumstances and experiences, and to achieve this “you really have to know what your kids are going through.” She elaborated on how she gets to know her students by giving the following examples:

I [assign] a student a get to know you poster chart at the beginning of the year that the students fill in introducing themselves and their interests and hobbies. I also use a student survey to see what the students would be interested in reading and learning more about.

Jessie stated how she also utilizes reviews and best seller lists, as well as student recommendations and requests, reading students’ IEPs, attending conferences, and by determining what gaps she has in the collection in order to purchase books. She expounds upon this process by stating:

Every year, the library collection runs a collection analysis. This determines how old each section in the library is, and what sections need to be updated with new materials and current topics. The School Library Journal also puts out new releases and so does Good Reads. Every year the AASL (American Association of School Librarians) puts out the best young adult fiction titles. All of these and individual student interests determine what the librarian can purchase with the budget they are given by the administration.

Jessie offered how she supports classroom teachers in their efforts to teach a particular topic or subject and locates the books for them. She also described how she team teaches with the classroom teachers. Jessie detailed her involvement in the process in the following statement:



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Teachers expect the librarian to help students with research projects in directing them to books, websites, and databases. Librarians can also plan the research project and rubrics and get all the supplies needed for the teachers. Team teaching and background lessons on taking notes, how to do research, what is an accurate source, how to site sources are just a few examples of lessons that I have done by team teaching with teachers.

Helping teachers and students with research is within librarians' field of expertise, and Jessie is clearly using her professional skills to assist her school's population whenever possible.

Similar to Jessie, Sandy also stated that students are interested in texts in which they see themselves and discussed how she observes the students' excitement while reading these texts. She described the students' interest by stating "they're going to pay attention" when "they see themselves reflected in the literature." She expounded on this concept when she described the students' excitement by the following remarks: "When the kids see people who look like them, they snatch those books right up, and they're so excited." Sandy shared that adults also benefit from their students' enthusiasm while reading because the students are more engaged and are actively learning. Her passion for multicultural literature and the need of utilizing such material was apparent when she argued the fact that her students do not "have access to what should be available to them." This statement makes the argument that she believes in the benefits of multicultural literature and works to ensure that her students are provided the opportunity to access diverse books. All the librarians who were interviewed made conscious efforts to provide a balanced collection of books for their students.

### **Promotion of Multicultural Literature is Important**

The outstanding impression from the subtheme was that not only the selection criteria are largely governed by the law of demand and supply, but also the promotion of the literature as well. It is evident from the participants' responses that the promotion of multicultural literature

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is vital. My definition of promotion is defined as the strategies the librarians utilize to encourage students to select and read books. One of the ways of meeting the needs of the students is to introduce them to literature that widens their perspective on cultural and racial matters. The promotion of multicultural literature can be a key factor in whether students are aware of such books and may spark an interest in reading them. The librarians stressed the importance of promoting multicultural literature within their libraries and promoted multicultural literature in mostly similar manners. Katerina used book talks, special displays, meet the author events, and special events to highlight different cultures. Similarly, Velma utilized book displays and special events, as well as bulletin boards, to promote the books in her collection. Velma described her efforts in following words:

What I normally do is figure out what month I'm working on, what topic I want to be working on during those few weeks, and then try to find books that will cover that and go along with what time of year.

Additionally, Sandy stated that she promotes books by developing a collection around a theme, by displaying the books from her collection where it is ensured that as many people are represented as possible, and through book talks with the students. These strategies worked to spotlight certain themes, holidays, authors, or themes that the librarians wished to publicize. It was evident through the participants' responses that they are thoughtful when determining a display and the books they have chosen. Their students can be encouraged to read a book that they may not be familiar with if they see it within an appealing display that captures their attention and imaginations.

### **Expanding the Students' Worldview**

#### **Building Positive Attitudes on Diversity through Literature**

The participants' responses revealed that they believe that books are a window into another world and may increase cross-cultural acceptability by students. Cross-cultural acceptability can be defined as the positive contributions that the literature lends to the students' deeper understanding of others' ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds and acceptance of that diversity. The librarians explained the benefits of building positive attitudes of diversity through the utilization of multicultural literature within the library.

Katerina is aware of the students she serves and the student demographics in her school when she shares that her school has Asian, American Indian, Chinese, American Vietnamese, and African American students, as well as a lot more students who are English Language Learners in recent years. A benefit of multicultural literature is explained by Katerina when she described it as a way for students to experience other cultures and different people from across the world. From her perspective, Katerina explained how she felt that her collection "should be a window into other worlds and cultures that they (students) are not familiar with." She offered the following account:

If you already are looking into the mirror a lot, and your culture is presented very heavily around you, then books are a way to experience other cultures and other experiences beyond you. So that's something I take to heart and really want to show my students.

Her perspectives about books being a window into another world offers a connection to the literature review. This also refers to Sims Bishop's concept of "mirrors and windows" where she explains that it is important for children to see the larger world and its people represented through literature.

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She expounded upon the idea of books being “windows” into other worlds and student interest in these books by stating that sometimes there is a natural connection between a student and a certain type of diverse book. Katerina explained how the student may be learning about a certain culture or country or they may interact with someone from another culture and show a curiosity where they want to learn more. She expressed that students may have limited experiences with people from other cultures and that multicultural literature may sometimes be their only experience with people of other cultures. Katerina indicated that multicultural literature is a “huge doorway” into the lives and lived experiences of others. Katerina described how she believes it is important for her students to understand cultural history, as well as modern day issues and practices. She offered the following example:

For example, I think I mentioned it's Native American Heritage Month. Our third graders always do a unit on Native American culture and history and things like that. So, I do Native American folk tales, but I also make sure that we're representing Native Americans in modern day. And we bring in a local Native American husband and wife who come in and talk about their own tribal traditions.

Katerina also recalled the lack of diverse books she experienced when she accepted the position as librarian within her current district. She explained that there was a great budget for books yet was “astounded at how little representation there was in the collection.” She elaborated by sharing her frustration and disappointment by the lack of diversity within the literature with even the most common books being absent, but she was working on developing the collection. The perspective of Katerina implies that she recognizes the value of multicultural literature and makes continuous efforts to improve upon the library’s collection.

In the same thread, Velma explained how she believes it is more important than ever to expose children to all different kinds of cultures, people, and beliefs and this goal can be achieved through the contributions of multicultural literature. Velma expressed that the students

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within her district were predominately White and that the collection would not be diverse if she only focused on those students. In her statement she indicated “if I stuck with just a reflection of our district, I would hardly have any different cultures outside of just what we have right here.” She recognized the need to stretch out beyond the current district’s population of students and tries to make sure she has a wide range of books and fills in the gaps that she has in her collection. She also implied that the books need to be of high-quality, stating the fact that she is not just plugging in a book, “but it needs to be a good quality book.” She concluded by stating that students may otherwise never see these aspects if they do not move outside of their small neighborhood. Through her acknowledgment of a lack of student diversity within her school, Velma makes it her responsibility to contribute to her students’ growth and understanding of different populations of people.

Similarly, Jessie highlighted the benefits of having cross culture literature in the following words: “Maybe we’ll cut down on some bullying, maybe show some compassion.” She described how the literature can help students dealing with things that they see all the time as “a way to actually discuss, talk about it.” In the same thread, Sandy clearly expressed that she utilizes multicultural books as something that the students “are doing every minute of every day in the library” by ensuring that everyone is represented regularly. She noted that multicultural literature can trigger students’ emotional reactions and they are able to relate to others after reading about different characters in books. Sandy described how they feel students can relate to other people’s problems by reading multicultural books, which will help them through life. She discussed how she observes that students will pick up a discussion about “feelings and issues that they feel like they’ve dealt with in their own life based on their own culture and their own experience” and that the students “really open up” during those discussions. All of the librarians

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mentioned engaging the students in discussions and helping them to be aware of the similarities they have in common with each other. They also referenced that students' need to recognize the differences within each other as something which makes them unique and should be celebrated.

### **Lack of Student Familiarity and Interest**

#### **Understanding and Acceptance of Diversity**

Another important theme which emerged is how the students' lack of familiarity and interest with multicultural literature correlates to the understanding and acceptance of people from diverse cultures and proved a challenge for the school librarians. Students' lack of familiarity and interest can be defined as the students not being familiar with other cultures and not expressing an interest in reading multicultural literature.

Katerina expressed how she believes that students sometimes are not receptive to borrowing a book where the main character does not look or speak like them due to a "lack of familiarity." She stated that she encourages students to consider more diverse books if the student shows no natural curiosity. Katerina shared her beliefs about utilizing literature to promote social justice and critical thinking skills and indicated her collection is currently limited in this aspect. She responded by stating, "I would love to do more of that" and "I don't necessarily feel like I do a lot of that right now." She shared her experience as trying to "muddle my way through" on how to reach students in a predominantly White, suburban setting. When asked, Katerina indicated that she discusses a lot of "hot button" topics with students who get parent permission to voluntarily participate in book groups. She cited being hesitant to have a whole class discussion due to parental pushback that other librarians in their district received while using the same books. Despite hindrances, Katerina tries to use literature that causes students to think about justice-oriented issues. She described how she ensures students make connections to past issues

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that continue to plague today's society. For instance, she makes that "connection" with them and helps them to realize that some past issues are "issues that continue today," whether that be racism or human rights.

Katerina expounded upon this concept as she described a voluntary book club that addressed racial profiling and the police force. She indicated that a lot of the students "did not know anything about the things that were going on now and in the past" and it "was very eye opening for them." She described the conversations as "rich" and probably the first discussions the students ever had related to racial tensions. Katerina acknowledged that some of her students' lacked knowledge about racial profiling and past and current racial issues, which offers alignment with critical race theory. She also offered how she discusses biases with her students. When asked if she teaches students to identify instances of prejudice, racism, and bias, she offered the following:

It's not necessarily something that's specifically part of my curriculum or instruction, but I do try to look at that. We do use digital citizenship lessons, sometimes looking at bias in media.

Katerina sees the need for these conversations and provides her students with opportunities to learn about issues that students their age face on a daily basis.

Velma explained the challenge she faced: students are just not interested in books in which the characters do not look like them or hold the same beliefs as them. She described her experience in the following account:

Some kids are just not interested. Occasionally, I'll hear them say, "why are we learning about this because, you know, we don't know anybody that's Asian, we don't know anybody that believes in Kwanzaa".

This lack of familiarity may cause students to see others who are different as "strange," and they may have difficulty relating to them.

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Sandy described this situation when she shared that a challenge for her was that sometimes uncomfortable discussions may result when students see a different culture “as strange.” Additionally, she noted the adversity cultivating racial equity within her school, which had an abundant population of white students. The students at Katerina’s school also lacked knowledge of relevant racial issues. Sandy detailed her first years as a librarian when she introduced a civil rights book to the students. She recounted her feelings and was “surprised how little they (students) knew” about the topic and discussions surrounding the civil rights movement. This experience leads me to believe that the problem may stem from the lack of material covered by teachers and within textbooks. The teachers may not see the need to teach these lessons in depth and only highlight the obvious, milestone events that stemmed from the movement. This concept contributes to a key theme of critical race theory, the permanence of racism in society, which asserts that racism is embedded in American life and culture. The students who lack knowledge of a defining event in American history may be the product of the bias evident in their textbooks and the bias that their teachers may hold.

### **Overcoming Challenges**

#### **Advocacy of School Librarians**

The librarians had different beliefs regarding the role of advocacy within their positions. Katerina stated that she feels that advocacy is not a part of her professional responsibility but is something that she undertakes personally. I gained the most insight into this issue from her experience. She specified that she had the opportunity to do a video conference with a Newbery Award winner. She wanted to introduce a book to their students, but the initial response from the teachers was that it was a “Black book” and got push back “immediately.” The teachers’



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indicated that their students may not connect with the book because the students were not Black. In Katerina's statement, she elaborated on how she continued with the video conference and introducing the book to the students. She described how the students "loved it" and "the copies were flying off the shelf." She indicated that exposure to this book and the students' positive reaction to the book changed the teachers' mindset regarding it being a "Black book" and her actions "changed that perception" and helped the teachers realize that "this book was for all students." This is the true essence of how librarians can advocate on behalf of their students.

Jessie described her advocacy work around soliciting books for her library collection. She canvasses requests through wish lists, reaching out to donors, and making connections with people and places that "want to put literature in kids' hands." Velma stated that she never had an experience where a book was challenged, but she been concerned about it a few times. She stated, however, that she feels it is important for the library to carry books that address ideas which diverge from the cultural norm. She expounded upon her beliefs by stating that these books can support students who need help working through different situations. This decision to carry these types of books demonstrates advocacy for the students and their needs, even though the topics may not be a popular concept. When asked about her advocacy endeavors, Sandy responded by describing how librarians perceive their roles by stating, "We think we're changing the world!" Sandy believes it is important to expose students to as many different people and ideas as possible while they are young, and this means obtaining books that reflect different ethnicities and races. She provided a final perspective on this concept by stating, "I think most of us do feel like this." These accounts provided an insight into the way each of the librarians thinks about what is important to them on the behalf of their students and the strategies they use in order to achieve a balanced library that can serve all students.

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### **Multiculturalism**

#### **Literature Reflecting Biracial Students**

Finally, the last theme that emerged was the school librarians' lack of knowledge of literature featuring Biracial characters and their experiences. The question posed was as follows: "Are you aware of books portraying Biracial characters within your library and do you believe it is important to include and promote these types of books? Can you explain why/why not?" While all librarians indicated they believed it was important to include and promote this type of literature, they either had difficulty sharing such literature they used or stated that they are limited in that area.

Katerina indicated that this was a great question to ask and believes it is really important to include and promote these types of books; however, she was not able to name any particular books. She went on to explain that she believes her collection is probably "pretty limited." In her statement she offered the following:

I think it's super important, yes, having a number of close friends who are mixed race. I think that's a really, really hard thing for a lot of people to not necessarily feel like they are of one race or another when they're mixed race. They don't necessarily identify with one individual race.

Because Katerina believed that these books were very important to include in her library collection, she asked me for recommendations for books which portray Biracial characters.

Similarly, Jessie was not able to name any books, but she believed it is important to others because it "teaches them (students) acceptance." She went on to say that she has a lot of students who go through situations where they struggle with identity issues, and books can help inform students and relay messages of not judging peers. Velma was able to identify books by name but explained that students rarely check them out. She displays the books and also reads the books to the students, but to no avail. She believes that students do not check these books out because

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they want to relate to what they are reading. Velma explained there are only a few Biracial students in the district, so this may be the reason for the students not relating to the topic. Sandy commented that she believes it is important to include books with Biracial characters and that she does have books in her collection; however, was not able to specifically name titles.

The following chapter will discuss the key findings, contributions to the field of educational leadership, recommendations and implications for the educational leadership for social justice, limitations, and conclusion of the study as a whole.

## CHAPTER 5

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

#### Discussions of Findings

The libraries which I visited were visually appealing with colorful bulletin boards, posters, and decorations adorning the walls. There were tables and chairs and one with a reading area set up with individual student floor chairs surrounding a rocker where students would await a story to be told. There were displays of books relevant to the approaching holidays on shelves and windowsills. There were areas conducive to large and small group learning and also areas for independent work. It is within these spaces that student learning and understanding takes place, where the students are introduced to new worlds and experiences and the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of themselves of others

The interviews provided insight into school librarians' utilization and understanding regarding multicultural literature and their role serving as the school librarian. It was quite evident through the conducted interviews this is the intent of the librarians: to provide their students with literature that reflects the students' values and lived experiences and also new and unknown ideas and populations of people. Through the interviews, it was clear that each librarian had an understanding of their students and strived to learn even more. Some of the librarians noted the gaps in their collections and the procedures that they followed in order to fill these voids. Most of the librarians expressed how they assist the classroom teacher in securing and extending lessons and topics presented within classrooms.

The districts' budgets were mentioned by all the librarians; they described the role that the budget played in their selection process. They also noted the benefits and addressed the challenges of utilizing multicultural literature. Katerina and Velma asked if I could provide them

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with the findings of the study in order to learn more about what they could do to support their students. Katerina also asked if I would be able to provide her with a list of books portraying Biracial characters and resources she could use because her collection was limited in that particular area. Thus, demonstrating a desire to provide her students with literature she noted would support racial awareness. The following section discusses the findings of the study relating to each of the five themes.

### **Utilizing and Promoting Multicultural Literature**

#### **Students as Important Determinants for Book Selections**

Students are the center of education and the reason why educational institutions and libraries exist. This study shows that student recommendations about books, the student demographics, and perceptions of librarians regarding what type of books will be liked by students play vital roles in determining the collections of books made available at school libraries. Another important determinant was librarians looking at book reviews and journal lists and determining popular books, then matching those with students' ethnicities and choices that influenced buying those types of books. Even though authors and book distributors, I believe, play a fundamental role in their selection process, the librarians did not focus on this aspect during the interviews. Therefore, these findings suggest that the students have access to some of the most recent, popular books which were published at that time. As a result, the students are provided the opportunity to interact with literature which represents modern-day society and reflects the students' present-day experiences.

### **Promotion of Multicultural Literature is Important**

There are many occasions and events that the respondents described using as opportunities to promote multicultural literature and to help students become familiar with different topics. Using bulletin boards to display literature on occasions such as heritage month and special holidays is a key strategy to promote such literature.

As a result of these practices, the students can be exposed to books which they may never have known existed that can help to promote interest and motivation to read and learn and assist in higher academic achievement. The students can also be invited to read books which they may relate to that can aid in a deeper sense of self and others. The concept of higher self-esteem is expanded by Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) when they explain that when students feel confident and take pride in themselves, they can achieve a high level of academic success by being more motivated to learn. Thus, the promotion of the books as explained by the librarians is an imperative facet to consider.

### **Expanding the Students' Worldview**

#### **Building Positive Attitudes on Diversity through Literature**

Another prominent theme in the participants' responses was the theme of expanding the student's worldview, which they considered necessary for building positive attitudes towards diversity. In view of the fact that students are generally predisposed to perspectives that incline to their cultures, the participants find it important to introduce them to texts that focus their perspectives with less familiar racial and cultural perspectives. All the participants shared similar views that their selection process was based on their recognition of the importance of diversity. The general idea behind the element of diversity was to ensure that the needs of all the

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students are covered. All the respondents indicated that the goal of meeting the students' needs was necessitated by the fact that their respective student populations reflected different racial and ethnic groups. The focus on diversity was managed in such a manner that both the dominant and minority groups were served. These findings suggest that by expanding the students' worldviews through literature generated productive, open discussions among the students. These types of the discussions create impressions among students that topics of race, tolerance, diversity, respect, self-esteem, cultural practices, belief systems, multiculturalism, and more are worth discussing and can increase acceptability of diverse populations.

Given the fact that students engage reality from a particular cultural perspective, the selected literature focuses on providing them with alternative ways of perceiving the world in which they live. The idea is to enable them to understand that certain realities exist outside their limited understanding of the world. With multicultural texts, students would be able to appreciate the fact that the world is governed by a wide range of differences—from cultures to race. Such an appreciation is also important for enabling their cooperation and collaboration with students outside their cultural or racial backgrounds. As a result, the librarians provided their students with multicultural books which have a profound impact not only on their understanding of different cultures, but also improve their appreciation of different populations of people.

### **Lack of Student Familiarity and Interest**

#### **Understanding and Acceptance of Diversity**

Despite the many priceless benefits, some students still may be naturally disinterested in multicultural literature. The responses from the participants confirmed this concept and

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indicated that the students should be guided by books that focus on the subject. The theme which revealed the students' lack of familiarity and interest with multicultural literature poses a challenge for school librarians and is important to address. Because of this lack of knowledge and interest, the students may have limited awareness of equity issues. Ignorance can lead to inaccurate or narrow understanding of racial equity and social justice issues, and it can affect how they respond to injustices they face. Helping students to appreciate the subject of diversity is particularly important because it opens their scope of understanding and the way it reflects in their environment.

Most of the librarians indicated that they believe they foster students' understanding of racial equity and social justice through multicultural literature and strategies. However, through further investigation of the participants' responses, it was found that there may not be an abundant amount of understanding on the students' part. Through the librarians' responses, it was evident that they understand the need to expand the students' world views and facilitated strategies they believed promoted this goal, but they realized it fell short of achieving the results they planned for.

Sandy noted the adversity cultivating racial equity within her school, where there was an abundant population of White students, because the students lacked knowledge of relevant racial issues. Jessie stated that she fosters students' understanding of racial equity and social justice by discussing why things are the way they are now and how we are able to change. Velma shared that she addresses this concern, however, she does not specifically indicate to the students to support any one idea or cause. She teaches these concepts through relaying messages of support, kindness, and creating a safe place for students. Most of the respondents believed that because students are not familiar with another culture, they seem disinterested in literature belonging to



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another culture. This then requires more effort on the part of librarians to engage with students in order to encourage them to read multicultural books. Katerina described the challenge as: “Sometimes the challenges are just encouraging students to try them.” This suggests that the students, despite being engaged with multicultural literature, continue to have limited background knowledge of the racial and cultural diversity of others. This may indicate that the students are not being exposed to authentic cooperative learning experiences with diverse populations of people. Knowing other peers that are from a different racial or cultural background and interacting with them increases interest and cross culture acceptability. James Banks (2006) refers to this concept when he argues that students can develop positive racial attitudes through experiences when he argues, “an important aim of schools should be to provide students with experiences and materials that will help them to develop positive attitudes and behaviors toward individuals from different racial, ethnic, language, and social-class groups” (p. 608). The result of this finding suggest that the students are not fully benefitting from the multicultural literature that they are being exposed to and need further support in order to become familiar with others’ backgrounds.

### **Overcoming Challenges**

#### **Advocacy of School Librarians**

The librarians had different beliefs regarding the role of advocacy within their positions as school librarians. First, Katerina cited advocacy surrounding a book which she believed would be valuable to her students, but she was challenged by teachers in the school. A second account of advocacy entails Jessie’s strategies for acquiring books for her collection. Velma likewise

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asserts that she carries books which diverge from the cultural norm, and she contends that students need these books to help them with problems they may undergo.

Despite the mixed strategies imposed, all librarians shared their concerns over a parent challenging a book in their collection. Importantly, none of the librarians experienced challenges by parents personally, although they observed other librarians in their district being challenged for the books they were using. The results imply that librarians consider it imperative to advocate in their students' best interest, but they may not fully engage or feel hesitant to engage in such activities because of parent dissatisfactions of seemingly controversial topics. Due to this lack of engagement, the students may not have opportunities to foster critical thinking skills in preparation to address and solve complex issues. As a result, the students are missing out on connections which help to foster an informed and engaged citizenry.

### **Multiculturalism**

#### **Literature Reflecting Biracial Students**

All the librarians agreed that literature portraying Biracial characters is important to include and promote within their libraries. In the participants' opinions, such books could be extremely resourceful in promoting positive attitudes about mixed races. Surprisingly, most of the respondents struggled when asked to name specific books with Biracial characters in their collection.

Cognizant of the problem of race in the wider American society, the participants were focused on the goal of challenging racial prejudice through the promotion of diversity. In their different ways, the participants believed that a positive focus on diversity and multiculturalism in their selection of literature could instill certain positive practices in students to help overcome

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biases, prejudices, and stereotypes. Thus, students would be enabled to counter injustices that tend to promote racial bias in society.

The participants' responses also infer that racial prejudice occurs in students' minds because of their narrowed scope of understanding regarding race and culture. Velma, who was able to name book titles she utilized, expressed that their students did not borrow the books—despite her best efforts to promote them. This finding suggests that librarians need to have an increased awareness of books which reflect Biracial characters and their lived experiences.

As stated earlier in this study, the participants report using current journal reviews as a method of book selection. Previous research indicates that popular book lists lack texts that reflect African American characters and African American authors; these lists are even more limited in Biracial literature. The incomplete publicizing of texts on Biracial cultures reflects the critical race theory's tenant, the permanence of racism, which demonstrates that racism is evident in today's society. Racism is indisputable through most children's literature reflecting predominately White characters, written by White authors. Utilizing counter-storytelling gives voice to the marginalized, which is critical race theory's centrality of experiential knowledge tenant. The lack of these experiences can play a critical role in perpetuating racism and exclusion of students. As a result, Biracial students are not exposed to literature that represents them and their experiences, which can help them cope with the unique challenges this study identified. Also, other students are not engaged with literature reflecting this population of students, which could lead to prejudice and acts of racism.

As an outcome of my analysis presented above, the key findings of the study and how they correlate with the research questions are presented below.

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### Research Question 1:

The first research question asks, “How do school librarians select, promote, and utilize multicultural literature within an educational setting?” Five interview questions related to the selection, promotion, and utilization of multicultural literature by school librarians. The first crucial finding reveals that librarians are aware of their students’ demographics and in consensus that carrying and promoting books which reflect their schools’ student populations is significant. Additionally, they believe it is important to include a collection of books which reflect diversity within their libraries.

### Research Question 2:

The second research question asks, “In what ways does the school librarian believe that multicultural literature influences students’ understanding and acceptance of diversity?” Three interview questions corresponded to diversity as it relates to multicultural literature utilized within the school library. The second key finding indicates that some librarians think their White students lacked knowledge of racial awareness and the issues surrounding race. Also, most librarians are unaware of books in their library which portray Biracial characters; however, all believe it is important to carry and promote such books.

### Research Question 3:

The third research question asks, “How do school librarians understand advocacy as part of their professional responsibility?” Three interview questions correlated with advocacy of school librarians. The third finding shows that, though not explicitly written as a job responsibility, respondents considered it as a social responsibility to engage in advocacy of multicultural

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literature. The librarians shared different strategies to engage in advocacy efforts, such as putting wish lists on Amazon to get attention of donors and building educational partnerships. Another way to advocate such literature involves connecting kids via video conference calls with authors of books that they are being taught. This highlighted the importance of multicultural literature for students and gave them the chance to connect with people of those cultures.

### **Key Findings**

The key findings support the idea that librarians need to expand their students' interactions with diverse populations for meaningful, authentic learning experiences. Additionally, school librarians must expand their multicultural literature collection to portray Biracial characters and their experiences. The results of this study found the need to make recommendations based on the findings; the suggestions can contribute to the most positive outcomes for both librarians and their students. The following section will discuss the contributions of this study to the field of educational leadership, followed by the suggested recommendations and its implications.

### **Contributions to the Field of Educational Leadership**

Librarians, teachers, administrators, and stakeholders in the field of education can gain a better understanding of the characteristics required to select, utilize, and promote multicultural literature that reflects *all* students in their districts. Additionally, this study demonstrates how all those involved can go beyond this literature to maximize student learning opportunities. Multicultural literature and learning experiences enable the students to meet new characters and worlds, students whose views on many issues in life differ from the one conditioned by their cultural and racial world standpoints. A school environment with diverse literature validates the

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students' experiences, motivates them to learn, helps them to achieve academically, and fosters critical discussions.

Although diverse literature has immense value, limited studies exist which explore the correlation between multicultural literature and the fostering of positive identity formation for Biracial students. This inequality is important to recognize because Biracial students can experience acts of racism and prejudice due to established preconceived beliefs based on the social construction of race. When schools recognize that their population of Biracial students will rapidly grow, they will need to validate their students' unique life experiences and help them form a positive racial identity. These experiences can assist in breaking down racial and cultural barriers so that the school environment becomes a welcoming, accepting place that honors student diversity. Another important benefit is the fact that students are able to achieve at a higher level of academic success. According to Shields (2004), "When children feel they belong and find their realities reflected in the curriculum and conversations of schooling, research has demonstrated repeatedly that they are more engaged in learning and that they experience greater school success" (p. 122). When these components are combined can foster the development of a well-rounded child who can experience positive educational and life experiences.

### **Recommendations and Implications for Educational Leadership for Social Justice**

An important implication found in this study is the fact that the librarians mainly cited utilizing discussions surrounding multicultural literature as a means to foster understanding and acceptance of diversity, but these discussions were met with limited student understanding. Some of the librarians explained the lack of knowledge many White students had regarding the present day issues that some marginalized students may encounter. The students' unfamiliarity

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suggests that the librarians' use of strategies that promote discussions to foster understanding and acceptance of diversity may need to be more intentional and frequent. Furthermore, the students need to engage in activities where they interact with diverse populations in meaningful ways, such as the recommendation provided below.

For the students who are not fully benefiting from multicultural literature or have limited connections with students whose racial and cultural experiences are different, cooperative learning experiences can bridge the social connection for students. For instance, pen pal activities can provide many benefits, including a greater understanding and acceptance of diversity. According to Walker-Dalhouse, Sanders, and Dalhouse (2009), pen pal experiences can “provide students with language skills, social skills, and an appreciation of diversity” (p. 339). The pen pal recommendation supports Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, in which he argues that social interactions play a fundamental role in the learning process. Through these social interactions, students can interact personally through shared interests and guided activities selected by the librarians.

Through authentic learning experiences, students are provided an opportunity to discuss current issues and how it affects them personally, ask questions, and relate to topics. As a result, students gain an understanding of dissimilar perspectives and associations that connect them to others. Social interactions with students outside their school (or those different from themselves) can lead to more interest in learning about others, along with building relationships. In a review of nineteen studies which analyzed the effects of cooperative learning strategies, Slavin (1985) established that sixteen had beneficial effects on racial attitudes and behaviors and on friendships. In fact, pen pal activities allow the students personal experiences with diverse populations, and this exercise can be extended to create a more meaningful connection. For

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instance, two participating schools could arrange for a meeting so the students would be able to correspond in-person. Students could use journal writing to respond to questions based on their contacts with their pen pal, read and discuss a book together, or collaborate on a shared project. These cooperative activities are versatile and can span to nearby neighborhoods, different parts of the U.S., and to different parts of the world. Clearly, students who have the opportunity to discuss interests, current issues, and ask questions are able to form a well-rounded perspective. Cooperative learning practices, such as pen pals, leads to global citizenry where students are aware of and understand broader world views and ways they relate to these views.

Secondly, this study found a need for more awareness regarding literature which portrays Biracial characters and their lived experiences and utilizing the literature with students. Through my research, it was evident that all the librarians believed that it was important to include these types of books in their collections. However, their inability to identify the books they used suggests that the books, if used, are not being done so with intention. Librarians need to reflect on their collection attainment process so adequate literature is available to represent the diversity of all children. In this vein, librarians also need to be familiar with the most popular books they use and recommend them as often as possible. The critique offered here is that school librarians should consciously and actively make known the books and resources available in regard to Biracial literature. Librarians are able to help support teachers in this endeavor and all educational goals to provide them with books, resources, reading strategies, and instruction for teachers and students alike. Librarians are also able to plan events or lessons which can incorporate the teachers' objectives and goals for students. Thus, these practices expand the librarians' skills and expertise into the classrooms and reach the students far beyond the library walls.



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Other areas of concern which were mentioned in the literature review that may be a challenge to Biracial students and their learning are listed in Table 2 with recommendations provided.

**Table 2: Concerns and Recommendations**

Area of Concern	Recommendations
Multiple student perspectives not sought by educators	Utilize questioning techniques to engage all student perspectives which encourages critical reflection and focuses on active student participation (McLaughlin and DeVogd, 2004)
Students not feeling welcome within the classroom environment	Recognize culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), recognize student bullying characteristics (Cheng et al. 2017), ensure the students' names are pronounced correctly (Zalaznick, 2019)
Inadequacy of diverse materials	Devise a formal selection process for materials that have culturally diverse themes, culturally relevant materials are embedded within daily instruction and not in isolation (James Banks, 1989))
Educator biases or assumptions inhibiting student learning	Educators being aware of their racial, ethnic, and cultural background and how it affects their perceptions and values, understand there is more than one way to interpret a situation, seek opportunities to learn more about students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Fergus, 2017)
Students not feeling accepted for who they are	Recognize that each student has a right to identify as they choose and understand the impacts of race as a social construction (Nuttgens, 2010)

These recommendations are supported through research-based practices which can help to support Biracial students. For example, in order for students to feel welcomed in the classroom the educator must ensure that the students are acknowledged and included in some capacity within each school day. It is also important for educators to recognize student bullying

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characteristics and to act upon the incidents promptly. According to Cheng et al., “If teachers can be more aware and intervene promptly in school bullying cases, they may be able to alleviate victims’ suffering” (2017, p. 351). When bullying incidents are addressed in a timely manner, the students who are affected are able to emotionally heal. The elimination of bullying will certainly bring about a safer environment for students where they can be made to feel welcomed. Finally, it is crucial that educators learn and pronounce each student’s name correctly. This may seem like an insignificant recommendation, unlike recognizing and responding to student bullying, however, the advantages are clear. Names are very personal and reflect one’s cultural identity. Even more important for students is the fact that mispronouncing or misspelling the student’s name can hinder their academic achievement and can be viewed as a microaggression. According to Mitchell (2016), teachers not taking the time to learn students’ names or validate the students can “hinder academic progress” (p. 1). Therefore, it is important for educators to ask students for the correct pronunciation of their names and to be thoughtful when recognizing them and in spelling their names correctly. It is also a sign of disrespect to assign a nickname to the student because their name is difficult to articulate or remember or to mock them because of a unique name. This effort on the part of the educator ensures that they value their students and that their students are respected. In turn, the students can view the classroom as a welcoming space where they can experience academic achievement and a positive sense of self.

Because Biracial students can be viewed as a marginalized group, social justice efforts need to be enacted in order to disrupt the systems which promote the marginalization for these students. I believe that these recommendations serve to provide more equitable experiences for Biracial students. This is not an exhausted list but presents ideas and strategies educators can use for support when seeking information to assist them. It is important for educators to remember

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that this is a continuous process and to educate themselves through professional developments and trainings related to the topics within the literature review and recommendations. When educators recognize the need for continued improvements within the field of education and that social justice encompasses traits such as empathy, understanding, respect, and fairness can bring about visibility for Biracial students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

I acknowledge that there were limitations to the study. The limitations that were established are as follows: a small group of participants (i.e., only four school librarians were interviewed), a homogenous population (racial and gender) were interviewed, and the study did not include student voices. This study could be investigated further by selecting more interview participants in order to gain additional insights into librarians' perceptions. The small sampling of participants will present a lack in generalizability for the study. Also, I would interview a more heterogeneous population of school librarians. All of the participants were female so I would include male librarians as well. The participants who responded to the emails I solicited for volunteers were all White so ensuring the diversity of the participants would provide even more insightful findings. A future study where students are interviewed in order to determine their perceptions regarding multicultural literature they were exposed to within the school library would significantly contribute to the field of education.

### **Conclusion**

This study pushes forward the discussion of how school librarians select, promote, and utilize multicultural literature and more specifically literature which reflects the Biracial population of students. Its findings have shown how librarians utilize these types of books to help promote the understanding and acceptance of diversity and promote positive racial identity for Biracial students and to assist in eradicating the biases, prejudices, and stereotypes that tend to promote racial bias in our society. Finally, the study illuminated the school librarians' perspectives on advocacy as part of their professional responsibility. The study sought unique perspectives and through the endeavor has revealed important key findings which will enable librarians to reflect upon how they select and utilize these books with all of their students.

School librarians are challenged to meet the needs of all students in ever changing dynamics within their schools. Specifically, one important change to the school dynamics is the expected increase of the Black-White Biracial population of students. A deeper understanding of their personal narratives can promote a positive classroom culture and ensure that they develop a positive racial identity. Furthermore, engaging with multicultural literature can benefit all students and research has shown that its uses can foster validation, motivation, and ultimately academic success. The magnitude of this study is not only in selecting and utilizing books in order to develop positive racial identity and empathy of others; it is about students and their academic achievement. It is through investigations such as this study that can lead the way for a more inclusive school environment where educators are encouraged to utilize and implement equitable resources and practices and to recognize the impact this has on academic success. This ensures that all students will be able to better understand our growing, diversified society, embody empathy, and instills in them a sense of pride where they can overcome challenges they

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may encounter with resilience. Ultimately, to help children flourish as adults who are able to sustain these ideals to the next generation.

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